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Trying It on the Dog

Maurice Switzer

TRYING IT ON THE DOG

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ASTOR LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R L

She was a different type from any girl he had met before

TRYING IT ON THE DOG

By

MAURICE SWITZER

Author of

Letters of a Self-Made Failure, etc.

Illustrated by

FRANK GODWIN

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PRESS OF
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BOOK MANUFACTURERS
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

To

All those gentlemen—and all those ladies—who are Directors of Publicity, to those who think they are and to those who hope to be.

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FOREWORD

Many an interesting story has been written around the stock market and the wheat pit, but few, if any, have touched that wealth of material which underlies the building of big business through the means of legitimate publicity—that is, with any degree of practical knowledge.

Now and then an improbable story has been written about advertising—such, for instance, as *It Pays to Advertise*,* which, while clever and amusing from the standpoint of farce comedy, is no more like the real inside of commercial publicity than a minstrel show resembles, even remotely, negro life on a southern plantation. Such stories, however, are as misleading as they are amusing, since

*The synopsis of this story was sketched and submitted to a publisher late in 1913, before *It Pays to Advertise* was produced. Because of the stirring events of the following four years, the work was laid aside until after the signing of the Armistice.

they create the impression that with sufficient publicity anything may be "put over" on the public; a fallacy which has led many a misguided fool into bankruptcy.

In this story the author has tried to correct that insidious impression by relating what he hoped might prove an amusing account of how a great commercial enterprise was quickly developed by means of legitimate advertising.

The popularity of the *Letters of a Self-Made Failure* and one or two other books led the writer to chance this more ambitious effort. If he has failed to measure up to the requirements of the task, this attempt may at least inspire some one better qualified to write, if not "a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner," still a story worth the reading.

TRYING IT ON THE DOG

TRYING IT ON THE DOG

CHAPTER I

NO MATTER how one approached New York, let him choose any route at his command, whether he came across the Jersey meadows, along the east or west bank of the Hudson, down the bay or through the sound into East River, he could not—unless he were blind or illiterate—escape this ubiquitous legend that forced itself into view from positions of advantage along the highways, the railways and the waterways:

BENZINIA
Makes Wash Day a Holiday

It was painted in brilliant colors on huge

bulletins which were cut out in the form of a cake of laundry soap. On summer nights, great electric signs on the banks of both rivers flashed the same announcements at regular intervals to the thousands of tourists or excursionists on the sound or river steamers, and to those work-worn masses who, lacking the price of a round trip to Coney, filled the recreation piers, placed at their disposal by a liberal city government.

On the bill-boards, in the newspapers, the magazines and in the surface cars, elevated and subway trains, Benzinia was heralded as a household blessing so persistently and consistently that it had become a part of every housewife's kitchen equipment, along with the salt and the pepper, the pots and the pans.

Aside from those lucky—or unlucky—gentlemen who live in clubs, bachelor apartments or hotels, every man was familiar with the marvelous properties of Benzinia, for the chances were that his wife or his maidservant not only bought the stuff, but saved the "valu-

able wrappers," which were good proportionately for anything from another bar of Benzinia to a baby grand piano.

The Benzinia Company was not quite formidable enough to warrant governmental regulation, but it was sufficiently important to keep a factory employing over a thousand hands going twelve months in the year and to support its president, Mr. Job Crosby, in a state of opulence which fully warranted his maintaining a country estate, a town house and a very respectable yacht, to say nothing of several motor-cars.

The Benzinia Company was the result of an idea, which, however, did not originate in the mind of the man who controlled the corporation. Not that Crosby lacked imagination or initiative or any of the other requisites of success, but it was he who snatched the business, as it were, like a brand from the burning, and from a bankrupt enterprise sent it along to success by the addition of his money, energy, experience and genius for organization.

Benzinia was an ordinarily good laundry soap with a benzine flavor—hence the name. It was a matter of common knowledge that benzine was a cleanser, so this fluid was added to the soap by a secret chemical process, and thus a remarkable product was evolved which converted the dreaded wash day into a holiday and the household drudge into a lady of leisure. This statement was made on good authority—take it from the printed wrapper on each bar of soap, bearing the signature of Doctor Henry A. Strong, discoverer of the marvelous process!

Doctor Henry A. Strong was a corner druggist with more imagination than application. Having conceived the great idea, he organized a company whose principal asset was enthusiasm, so, lacking sufficient capital to buy a plant, the doctor arranged to have his soap manufactured for him by a Brooklyn concern. The Brooklyn man, who was a practical soul, looked at Strong's formula and smiled. He opined that while it was entirely

possible to mix benzine with the usual soap masses, the volatility of the fluid made it impossible, in his opinion, to keep the benzine from evaporating, and that, therefore, while the stuff might smell like benzine and might taste like it—if any one cared to make that test—there wouldn't be enough benzine left, by the time the cake got into use, to remove the specks from a window-pane.

Strong replied that he was looking for a soap-maker, not an argument, and since he had the requisite cash in hand for the purchase of a few thousand bars of soap, the Brooklyn man took the hint and the cash and in due course delivered the soap.

It is not on record that Strong made many tests, if any, to discover the value, in practical operation, of his invention. The delivery of the soap, however, fired him with the same enthusiasm and instilled in him the same measure of pride that a fond father feels when he gazes on his first baby, so he set about to round up his friends for the purpose of

unfolding the possibilities of his great product, of which he could now show a sample.

Here was something, he told them, that required nothing but a little judicious advertising to put it on the shelves of every kitchen in the United States, not to mention foreign lands. Strong pointed out that the average bar of soap lasted probably two weeks; that there were some 25,000,000 families in this country alone, and that practically each one of those families invested in a bar of laundry soap at least once a month. Now, with an article as good as his, it was reasonable to suppose that it could be sold to one family in ten—surely that was a modest estimate—and if only that much were accomplished, it would mean a sale of 2,500,000 bars every two weeks, or a total of 60,000,000 bars a year. If the soap, therefore, netted only one cent per bar, that would mean a profit of $600,000 per annum. Even if this were cut in half to meet the lowest estimate, wouldn't it still represent $200,000? Surely a neat income from a simple idea.

And so he talked on with optimistic enthusiasm until he had hypnotized a few more of his friends into the belief that the stockholders in the new company would eventually make the Chicago Beef Barons look like tail-enders in the bread line. He managed to raise an additional $5,000 among his intimates, sold out his drug store and put the proceeds into the soap company to prove his confidence in the scheme.

This was the beginning of the Benzinia Company, capitalized at $50,000, with about $12,000 paid in. The enterprise lived a year and then went into the hands of a receiver, who sold out the business for the benefit of the creditors.

The chief assets were the trade-mark and formula, and these were offered to the highest bidder.

Just about this time, Job Crosby was looking for something with which to occupy his active mind. He had just sold out his dental-cream business to a large corporation in the druggists' sundries line and he had emerged

from the transaction with the better part of his life before him and nearly a million in cash.

Crosby had built up his business by advertising. The formula for the dental cream he had purchased from a chemist some ten years before. It was a good preparation, and Job was a man of resources, energy, imagination, nerve and personality. He began at a time when advertising was not, as it is now, so widely recognized as an economic necessity and when the cost was not so high as to require a fortune to make an impression. In ten years he had established a business which was second to none in his line in the country.

Now he was out of business, but he could not sit in idleness and rest content to live on his income, after his active career. He wanted occupation. So it happened that one day while he was perusing the "Business Opportunities" column in a morning paper, his eye caught the receiver's advertisement, offering at public auction the Benzinia business, together with

the trade-mark and formula. The name struck him instantly. He had seen some of the advertising and his analytical mind quickly visualized the possibilities of Benzinia, properly financed and marketed. He attended the sale and bought the stock, labels, formula and good-will, all for the sum of $1,500.

Crosby knew no more about the soap business than he did of navigation, but he did understand the intricacies of marketing a product for public consumption through the means of advertising, and with his experience and means, he no more dreamed of failure than he expected to go into vaudeville or some equally foolish venture. With him business was an exact science, the same laws applying with equal force to all legitimate enterprises. He knew those laws and he put them into practice so well that in the short space of five years he had built up Benzinia to a magnitude many times as great as his dentifrice business.

Strong's failure was another of those little tragedies which are being constantly enacted

on the stage of commerce. They happen every day. Some optimist with the gift of imagination conceives a plan for the enrichment of himself and his friends. The idea may be good, but the simon-pure optimist doesn't know that an abstract idea, unless it be pushed to a logical conclusion by practical, prosaic work, is nothing more tangible than a dream, so he gives himself up to the illusion that because somebody else has achieved success in a given field he can do the same thing. Until he is suddenly awakened from his dream he never realizes that success is generally wrung from failure only after tireless effort, bitter heartaches and frequent discouragement and that only in rare instances does fortune smile on the novice or the indolent.

Strong's idea was good, but he would have required more than a hundred times the capital he had scraped together to have made it win. His failure was foredoomed from the very beginning; he possessed but one element of the many which make for commercial success—

imagination. He had neither sufficient money nor experience in general business, so like many another misguided individual he did nothing but lay the foundation for an edifice which remained for a master builder to complete.

No doubt in after years, if he looked upon the monument whose corner-stone he had laid, he cursed his luck and railed against an unjust providence. He would never have admitted that his own limitations were to blame and not providence. He would probably have been the last man to concede that circumstances over which he had no control, and which he lacked the judgment to analyze, had fitted another to succeed where he himself could never have won.

CHAPTER II

JOB CROSBY was graduated from the "University of Hard Knocks." He was forced by circumstances to quit school when he was fourteen, since when he had earned his own living. From the very bottom he had worked his way up to where he had saved a few thousand dollars; then he went into business for himself and his success was practically immediate. Not that he began to make money fast, but he had acquired what he called a "versatile appetite," so no matter what he made, he never quite lived up to his income. The result was that his business gradually increased so that in a few years, before he had reached middle life he had become a moderately rich and successful manufacturer.

He had married young, but his wife had

died shortly before he had bought the Benzinia business. He had one child, Muriel, to whom he was greatly attached and who had about this time just returned from a fashionable finishing school.

Crosby was a typical self-made American. He was big and muscular, clean-shaven, large-nosed, shaggy-browed, broad of jaw and impressive. Any time he appeared among men his presence was felt and his personality was apt to dominate. He was a good dresser and he usually kept his ample iron-gray hair arranged according to the mode. He had a keen sense of humor and no small fund of philosophy, original and borrowed.

Crosby possessed a variety of knowledge, ranging all the way from literature to live stock. He was a sort of human sponge that absorbed information, a good talker but an equally good listener, and he had a gift of memory that was the bane of his office force. He seemed never to forget facts or figures and he had the faculty of finding little errors and

checking up loosely made statements developed to the point of uncanniness. When he asked for information he wanted it accurately and woe betide that department head who came in response to his summons and who was unprepared when asked a question to supply the answer promptly and correctly.

Crosby, in common with other men, had his little weaknesses. He was somewhat vain and quite susceptible to flattery, even when it was not adroitly administered. He was probably to some extent aware of his weakness but he was equally cognizant of his ability, so that he was occasionally misled by a good talker who was willing to curry favor with him by playing up to his vanity. Like many another man of marked ability he was a better judge of methods than of men. Unlike many of his kind he was not prejudiced against the college-bred man. Nobody regretted the lack of a real education more than he did and it was his theory that a university training was bound to help a youth with brains, while one without

brains couldn't be harmed in any circumstances. He had spared no expense on his daughter's education, and two important positions in his organization were filled by college men: that of sales manager and advertising manager.

Wesley Reed, who presided over the sales, had been educated for the law. His father who had died just after the young man began to practise his profession had been an old friend of Crosby. Reed was left without funds, and having been reared in luxury was unprepared, when his father died penniless, to cope with the uncertainties that confront a fledgling lawyer in a big city like New York.

Reed was on terms of social equality with Crosby, so it was not a difficult matter for him to get the position of sales manager, which just about the time he needed a job, was vacant. Crosby felt that a legal mind would prove an asset to the business and he fancied that under his guidance Reed could be developed into a valuable aid.

Junius Peck, who had charge of the advertising department, had managed to work his way through college by sheer industry and persistency. In the summer he was not above doing menial labor, though occasionally he acted in a reportorial capacity for one or two papers. Later he had tutored a few sons of the rich and so, through unflagging effort, he had managed to get his living and his sheepskin.

Peck's newspaper experience led him into the advertising field and his lively imagination, resourcefulness and industry fitted him for the business. He had already had three years' experience as advertising manager with another concern when he became associated with Crosby.

The executive offices of the Benzinia Company occupied the better half of one of the top floors of a large office building in lower Manhattan. Crosby believed in attractive offices, both because of the favorable impression such quarters made upon visiting customers and for

the reason that since he spent the greater part of his time at work, he saw no good reason why his surroundings should not be just as inviting during the long hours of business as they were during his leisure moments at home. The center of the offices was devoted to an accounting department in which probably two hundred clerks were employed. President Crosby's office looked out upon the Battery and the bay beyond. Adjoining his room in succession were the offices of Reed and Peck.

Crosby leaned back in his comfortable swivel chair one morning and picked up from his flat-topped desk a sales record of the preceding month, which had just drawn to a close. He knitted his brows as he scanned the sheet and suddenly pressed a square thumb on a push-button.

"Tell Mr. Peck I want to see him," he said to the office messenger who came quickly in response to his summons.

"Peck," he began, when that gentleman had

arrived, "I've just been looking over the May sales, and I find that we've fallen behind over fifteen per cent. as against the same month last year."

"Yes, sir," said Peck, "I know we have."

"We've spent over $3,500 more for advertising than we did last May; how do you account for the drop in sales in the face of the additional publicity?"

"I never thought that copy would pull, Mr. Crosby."

Crosby made an impatient gesture.

"Nonsense, Peck," he said, "I've built up this business on that kind of copy. Do you mean to say that we'd have made a gain instead of a loss if we had used the copy you suggested?"

"I can't prove it," smiled Peck.

"Even if the copy didn't pull, that doesn't explain the loss," said Crosby fiercely. "Does it, Mr. Peck?"

"No. Business didn't fall off because of the advertising but in spite of it. I believe that

had other things been equal we should at least have broken even, regardless of what copy was used."

"What do you mean by other things being equal?"

Peck was not the sort of man who sidesteps responsibility yet he would ordinarily go to some lengths to avoid an argument; but he felt himself driven into a corner.

"I mean," he said pointedly, "that had the sales department followed up the advertising in the territory in which it was done, there wouldn't, in my opinion, have been any loss."

Crosby's countenance took on an ominous change which Peck was quick to notice and not wishing to precipitate a row he added:

"Don't think for a moment, Mr. Crosby, that I'm presuming to teach you the advertising business; this company is ample evidence of your ability in that direction, but you know that advertising must be backed up, and it appears to me that sometimes we're asleep on the job."

Crosby looked Peck full in the eye for several seconds, then down came the same square thumb on the push-button, and before the messenger had fairly stepped over the office threshold he snapped:

"Mr. Reed,—want to see him immediately!"

CHAPTER III

REED arrived, drew up a chair and sat down unbidden with the easy familiarity of one who feels himself perfectly at home. Favoring Crosby with an engaging smile which disclosed two rows of excellent teeth he asked:

"Sent for me?"

"Yes, I've been trying to find out why our sales fell off in May, in spite of the advertising which exceeded what we spent during the same period last year."

"Well," began Reed, with the slow deliberation of one who is pondering deeply, "you know that we had some stiff competition in the two states where we did the additional advertising—"

"We have stiff competition everywhere," interrupted Crosby impatiently.

"True," agreed Reed, "but the Flint people got in there about the time our publicity started, with a premium scheme, and loaded up the dealers."

"Flint's goods don't compete with Benzinia," objected Crosby.

"They do to some extent," countered Reed, "especially when the dealers push them."

Then with a happy inspiration he added:

"Besides, I believe that we got into the wrong publications. We spent enough money, but we didn't, in my judgment, reach the right people with our advertising; I've had a dozen of our men tell me so."

"You don't think, then, that the copy we used had anything to do with it?" asked Crosby, looking at Peck out of the corner of his eye.

Reed knew who was responsible for the copy.

"I certainly don't!" he said with finality.

"That's Peck's explanation," said Crosby, nodding toward that uncomfortable individual. "He also thinks that the sales department is asleep."

Reed colored and started to say something but Peck interrupted him.

"One moment, please, I said 'sometimes I think we are asleep.' I still say so." Looking from one to the other he continued: "If we had been on the job, Flint couldn't have got in. Mr. Reed knew that they were going after the territory where we were slack, before our advertising started. He should have covered it before a line of our copy appeared in the papers—not waited until after we had shot our wad. All we did was to create a demand for laundry soap just about the time the Flint people got on the ground with a free offer. What little goods of ours the dealers had on their shelves they sold out, and when that was gone they forced out Flint's stuff, which cost them less.....in other words, we created a demand for the other fellow—"

"Don't tell me," broke in Reed airily, "that a woman's going to take Flint when she calls for Benzinia!"

"You practically said so yourself, a moment ago," retorted Peck.

"I said nothing of the kind—what I said was—"

"Never mind getting into an argument," interrupted Crosby, "you've put your finger on the spot, Reed. We've been in the wrong mediums. I suppose I should have checked over the list.....I don't know what we have an advertising man for!"

"Neither do I," said Peck.

"Well, since you agree," retorted Crosby, "that's one situation we can quickly alter."

"That's entirely up to you, Mr. Crosby. I certainly don't think that I should be held responsible for the failure of some copy with which I had nothing to do."

"There you go again with your 'copy'! What was there so remarkable about the drivel you wrote that would sell soap?"

"There was an element of curiosity about it that would have aroused a certain amount of interest. There was nothing in what we ran but a bald announcement that has grown stale and has ceased to attract attention. We needed something different this time if ever we did, in the face of Flint's drive."

"The only thing in the way of curiosity that your stuff would have aroused would be wonder on the part of sane people that a house like this could waste its money on such twaddle. Why," snapped Crosby by way of a parting shot, "the stuff you wrote couldn't sell dog soap!"

Peck smiled sadly but made no reply. Reed grinned approval. Crosby looked at his watch and rising to indicate that the interview was at an end, stalked out of the office, followed by Reed.

Peck stood where he was for a moment undecided what to do. As he turned to go he discovered that he was not alone.

Miss Muriel Crosby had come in by another

door unobserved by any one, and she had apparently been in the office for the last few moments and overheard some of the conversation. She walked up to Peck and extended her hand.

"I'm so sorry," she said with a very attractive smile.

Now it is bad enough for a young man to feel that he has been unjustly abused, not to mention publicly—or semi-publicly—humiliated, but when that sort of thing happens in the presence of a beautiful young lady whom he has long secretly admired and to whom above any one he has desired to appear heroic, he feels that the fates have handled him outrageously. The whole situation passed rapidly before Peck's mind. He certainly must have looked like a beggar—and a cowardly one. Why hadn't he chucked discretion to the winds, told Crosby politely but with dignified directness what he thought of him and his job, delivered the same brand of oratory to the truckling Reed, only more vehemently and

but he hadn't, and Muriel was still smiling and holding out her hand.

"Don't feel sorry for me, Miss Crosby," said Peck, shaking hands, "I suppose it's all in a day's work."

"Oh, I'm sorry for father; I didn't know he could be so uncivil."

"Now you've spoiled it. I thought you were sorry for me and I was just going to say that to have your sympathy was worth any old call-down, deserved or not."

"Then you have it, Mr. Peck," she smiled, "and I congratulate you on the splendid command you have over yourself, and I shall tell father what I think of him, too."

"Oh, please don't do that; really, it isn't worth while—"

"Oh, yes, it is; and besides," she added lightly, "if you ever write advertising for a dog soap, I shall never buy any but the kind you advertise."

"You heard that, did you?" said Peck,

going crimson, "well, who knows—I may go to the dogs yet. Good morning."

Peck walked moodily toward his office.

"Dog soap!" the suggestion stuck in his mind. "Dog soap," he repeated audibly as he walked into his room.

"Sir?" questioned Miss Stuart, his stenographer, in surprise.

"Nothing," he replied, not aware that he had been thinking aloud. He looked over some records on his desk but he could not concentrate on his work. Dog soap seemed to stick in his memory. He thought of the many people he knew who owned dogs, and the thousands of dogs owned by people he didn't know. He lit a cigar and smoked reflectively. Then he jumped up so suddenly that Miss Stuart wheeled about and stared at him.

"Miss Stuart," he said, slapping his knee, "I'm going to the dogs!"

Miss Stuart looked at him in alarm.

"What?" she questioned.

"Telephone to the Society for the Preven-

tion of Cruelty to Animals, and find out for me, if you can, how many dog licenses have been issued this year; also ascertain, if possible, whether the number has increased this year over last. I'm going to lunch; try to have the information for me by the time I return, will you?"

The young lady was astounded.

"You really mean that, Mr. Peck?" She seemed in doubt as to whether he was delirious or a bit daft; either condition was serious enough.

"I certainly do," said Peck. "No," he added, reading the look in her eyes, "I'm not batty, I'll tell you all about it when I get back."

As he left the office she followed him with her eyes and shook her head. But she took down the telephone receiver and asked the office switchboard operator to get the S. P. C. A. on the wire.

CHAPTER IV

CROSBY, accompanied by Reed, returned to his office a few minutes after his interview with Peck. The frown he wore indicated that he wasn't in the best of humors, but his countenance cleared immediately when he discovered his daughter comfortably seated in his swivel-chair.

She accepted his affectionate salutations with such unusual indifference that he asked in surprise:

"What's the matter, Muriel?"

"I've had a terrible shock, dad."

"What's happened?" asked Crosby in alarm.

Reed, who was in the act of extending his hand, stopped short:

"I've discovered that you have a bad tem-

per, and," she smiled sweetly to let him down a bit easier, "I'm almost inclined to say, worse manners."

"Good lord!" exclaimed Crosby, drawing up a chair next to her and sitting down in relief, "I thought that you had driven your car into something or somebody."

"In that case, the other party would have been shocked, eh, Muriel?" remarked Reed.

"You irrepressible humorist!" she said in a tone that indicated a total lack of appreciation for the witticism.

"Well," asked Crosby, "when have I sinned and how?"

"I was standing at the entrance there," said Muriel, pointing toward the door through which she had come, "while you were scolding Mr. Peck. I stepped back into the hall, but you spoke so loudly that I couldn't help hearing all you said. However, I have apologized to him for you."

"You apologized to him!" exclaimed Crosby, getting up and sitting on the edge of his desk.

"Apologized to him," he repeated, "well, I'll be...."

"Yes," said Muriel calmly, "I knew you wouldn't, so I did."

"Apologized for what, may I ask, my dear young lady?"

"For the way in which you spoke to him."

"Ah, then you didn't object to what I said?"

"I objected to your bad taste in saying anything of an unpleasant nature to one of your employees in a tone that could be heard outside of your office, and," here she shot a glance at Reed, "in the presence of another employee."

Reed got the message and winced. He considered himself above the level of an employee and he did not like the inflection Muriel put on the word, especially since he hoped some day to make the Crosby residence his permanent address, and he was already sufficiently at home there to call the young lady by her given name.

"All right, boss," said Crosby with mock deference, "I consider myself reprimanded and

can only plead extreme provocation as my excuse. But don't you think that you are scarcely practising what you preach," nodding toward Reed, "when you take me to task in the presence of an employee?"

"Oh," laughed Muriel, "I intended to include Wesley in my criticism. From the glance I caught of him, he seemed to be enjoying Mr. Peck's discomfiture with some relish."

"Not at all, Muriel," pleaded Reed; "unfortunately, you heard only part of the conversation. Your hero—or your martyr, whichever you please—tried to shift the burden of his error to my shoulders and I merely attempted to defend myself—is that correct, Mr. Crosby?"

"Quite so."

"Mr. Peck isn't my hero," said Muriel, bridling, "nor do I think he needs either a champion or an apologist. I know he's a gentleman, however, and he looked dreadfully humiliated when he saw me."

"Well," said Crosby, "he got only what was coming to him; it won't hurt him any.... but,

ah,....I had no idea he was a friend of yours, Muriel; how do you happen to know so much about him?"

Reed was interested, too, so he moved up a bit closer.

"Oh, he's no particular friend of mine," she said, with a show of indifference. "I met him down at the settlement house, where he talked to the boys occasionally. He walked home with Margery Williams and me on one or two occasions. We both found him unusually interesting, that's all."

"Well," commented Crosby sententiously, "it's enough for a beginning."

"What do you mean by a beginning, dad—do you object to the acquaintance?"

Crosby had grown rich through his own efforts and there was nothing of the snob about him, but he felt a bit differently about the associates of his daughter.

"N—o," he replied slowly, "I can't say that I object, but I'm not exactly enthusiastic, either. Of course...."

"Well?"

"Oh, nothing; you're twenty-one, and I have never attempted to interfere in your friendships when you were younger, so I don't intend to do it now...." He stopped as though he wanted to say something else but did not know just how to put it.

Muriel read his mind, however.

"I understand, dad," she said, "you don't quite approve of him; he isn't quite aristocratic enough for our set. Is that it?"

"No, that's not it, but if you like it that way, why, have it so," replied Crosby, a little piqued that his daughter had so nearly guessed what he was thinking.

Muriel possessed many charms, not the least of which was an entire absence of all semblance to snobbery quite uncommon in an exceedingly pretty young woman who was the sole heir to a rich and indulgent father. She was gifted with a keen and alert mind and she appreciated more than anything else the same mental qualities in others. She had many

admirers among the indolent sons of the rich, but none of them could interest her for more than an hour.

Peck was different. He liked the things she liked, read the books she read, and though he seemed to possess a fund of general information, he was not the least pedantic, as his natural sense of humor never permitted him to take himself seriously. She hoped to know him better and she meant to do so.

"Never mind, dad," she laughed, putting her arm about his neck as she rose to go, "I shall never marry beneath the lofty station of the aristocratic Duchess of Benzinia, patron saint of wash-ladies."

She closed his lips with a kiss and was gone before he could say anything.

Crosby looked at Reed and threw up his hands in a gesture of dismay.

"Can you beat her?" he asked.

Reed's expression indicated that he would have liked to do so, had he been qualified to perform that operation.

CHAPTER V

WHEN Peck returned from luncheon, Miss Stuart was not at her desk, but he found a note from her stating that she had been unable to get the information he desired over the telephone, so she had gone up-town after it. He had just finished reading the memorandum when she arrived.

"I'm sorry you went to all that trouble," he said.

"It wasn't any trouble. I wanted to do a little shopping, anyhow, so I thought I could kill two birds with one stone. I'm a little late as I stopped for lunch, too."

"Did you get the information?"

"Yes—that is, partly. I was in luck; I happened to know one of the young ladies in the office and she got the data for me."

She handed him a slip of paper containing some vital statistics and other facts relating to animals and on which she had made some memoranda in pencil.

Peck scanned the figures eagerly.

"Great!" he exclaimed, "I had no idea there were so many mutts in town—that is quadrupeds—and they're increasing, too....I wonder why?" He addressed the question half to himself.

Miss Stuart looked at Peck with the sympathetic expression of one who feels genuinely sorry for an old friend who has suddenly gone off balance.

"I can't imagine," she said soothingly, "possibly the good work the dogs did in the war has stimulated an interest in them, don't you think?"

"Very likely," said Peck abstractedly. Then he added with sudden animation:

"Miss Stuart, I know that you are dying with curiosity to find out why I want all this information about dogs, now aren't you?"

"Well....it has puzzled me some, I'll admit."

"Naturally. Now, if you'll put on your hat and take me up-town to the S. P. C. A. rooms and introduce me to your friend, I'll let you into a deep secret on the way up."

"All right," she assented without much enthusiasm.

A few minutes later they were both on the elevated.

By the time they had reached Twenty-third Street, he had disclosed to the astonished young woman his intention to go into the manufacture of dog soap. Hence his desire to find out, if possible, the potential market for the product. He had an idea how many canines there were under license in New York City; now it would be interesting to ascertain how many there were in other large towns in the United States. If the other cities compared with the metropolis, the field was enormous and the soil was virgin. Nobody was making a drive on dog soap. The discovery was nothing less than an inspiration!

Miss Stuart was not greatly impressed. The business seemed *declassé*.

"And, anyhow," she argued, "you haven't even a recipe."

"Oh, I'll get that easily enough. That's merely a matter of chemistry," said Peck lightly. "The great difficulty nowadays is to find something that isn't a drug on the market."

He studied her downcast expression; she looked about as cheerful as a pall-bearer.

"You wouldn't care to be chief stenographer for the Peck Canine Soap Company, would you?" he asked with a whimsical smile.

"Wait until you get your company formed, and then we'll talk it over," she replied non-committally.

By this time they had reached their destination and a few minutes later Peck was introduced to a gentleman who promised that he would do all he could to get the desired additional information, or at least as much of it as

was available from the files, but it would require some time.

Together they returned to their office, where they found Reed looking pensively out of the window. Apparently he had just come into Peck's room for some purpose and was waiting for him to put in an appearance. He looked at Peck quizzically, when he saw him come in with Miss Stuart, who had her hat on, as though he thought the situation unusual, but he said nothing.

"Waiting for me?" asked Peck as he hung up his hat.

"Yes; I want to have a little chat with you .....ah...." looking at Miss Stuart, "perhaps you wouldn't mind coming into my office?"

"Certainly, if you prefer," agreed Peck, following him into the adjoining room.

"Peck," began Reed, after they were seated, "if you had any criticisms of the way I was running my department, why didn't you make them to me, personally? Wouldn't that have been friendlier?"

Peck reflected for a moment before he replied, and then he chose his words carefully:

"You didn't know that I had criticized you when you told the old man that one of the causes of our loss of business was due to the mediums we used, did you? You knew that the copy was his and that I selected the mediums. You weren't particularly friendly, were you?"

Reed had some difficulty in finding an answer; finally he said:

"I felt—naturally—that he—er—wouldn't have sent for me and questioned me in your presence unless you had laid the blame at my door."

"Well, if that's so, why didn't you set the example of friendliness you're talking about, by sticking to the truth like a man, as you started to do, instead of trying to crawl out of a hole on my back?"

"What do you mean by sticking to the truth?" demanded Reed, with some warmth.

"That Flint beat you to it."

"See here, Peck, I don't like your attitude and unless you change it, there's no use to go on with the discussion."

"There hasn't been any discussion," said Peck, getting up as though he had nothing more to say. "I didn't know you wanted to discuss anything, I thought you wanted to put me on the witness-stand."

"Well," said Reed, cooling down, "perhaps we've both been a bit hasty; sit down a minute."

"I'm tired of sitting down; I've been sitting on the El for an hour. Go ahead, shoot, I'm listening."

Reed arose and walked over to where Peck stood looking abstractedly out of the window at the busy harbor in the distance.

"What I want to say is this: we've got to cooperate, you and I, or one of us will have to go. Now I don't want to force the issue, Peck, but you know that 'a house divided against itself must fall'—"

"Yes," interrupted Peck, "I learned that at Sunday-school."

"Well, it's the truth. We've been working at odds instead of together, and that's one of the reasons why we don't get better results; there's no coordination, and the principal sufferer is the company. Now—"

"Oh, piffle!" exclaimed Peck impatiently, "why waste time talking platitudes? I've tried to tell you dozens of times what I thought of several things around here, but you never were interested. Now I happen to have twice your experience in business and while I'm not much older than you, I've had to scratch for my living and my schooling and that taught me some things you'll never understand. You were trained to give advice, not to take it. Unfortunately—or fortunately, I don't know which—you are on terms of social equality with the old man and that gives you his ear. I don't count; I have nothing to say. All I have to do is follow orders. If business is good it's due to the old man's judgment, if it's

bad, it's my fault. I'm tired of being a glorified office-boy and I've about decided to run my department my way or quit. That's all!"

"All right," said Reed with a shrug, "if that's the way you feel about things, I'm through."

"Well, that's the way I feel. I admire many things about Crosby, and I've learned a trick or two from him, so I haven't wasted my time here; but he knows it all. He's running this business to-day just as he did ten years ago and times have changed, but he doesn't know it. He'll wake up some day when it's too late."

They stood silently looking out of the window. There seemed nothing more to say, or if there were, Peck was apparently unreceptive. Finally Reed said irrelevantly:

"I had no idea that you and Miss Crosby were such good friends."

Peck turned a trifle red; then he looked sharply at Reed and asked innocently:

"Are we?"

"Well, from the way she defended you this morning, I judged you were."

"Then you discussed me? That was nice."

Reed was not inclined to volunteer any information. It suited him to have Peck remain in ignorance as to what part he had played in the discussion and whether his reputation had or had not suffered. Finally he said patronizingly:

"Oh, she thinks you're just about right."

"Too bad, isn't it," said Peck, smiling ironically, "that father doesn't share her opinion?"

"Muriel doesn't care much what father thinks," said Reed with emphasis on the young lady's given name for the purpose of impressing Peck with the fact that his intimacy warranted the familiarity. "Of course," he added, "he could make it unpleasant for an unwelcome guest, and—"

"I get you," said Peck, "better not butt in on her visiting list, eh?"

"Oh," said Reed, with a deprecatory wave

of the hand, "it's none of my business, you know."

"No, of course not; you only mentioned the fact as....well, as a matter of 'friendliness.'"

Reed made a strong but unsuccessful effort to restrain his anger at Peck's sarcasm.

"I only mentioned it," he sputtered. "Oh—go to the devil!"

"Thanks; I should be glad to oblige you, old man, but I have already decided to go to the dogs, instead."

Smiling pleasantly, Peck strolled toward his own office, leaving Reed to make whatever he could out of the former's disclosure as to his intended destination.

CHAPTER VI

THE relationship between Peck and Reed had been strained for several months. Peck had little respect for the latter's qualifications for his job, for which he seemed apparently unfitted by reason of his previous training, and he was not very receptive to suggestions. Reed took the high ground that business was neither very deep nor scientific, and that he could master the details quite unaided, especially by a youngster like Peck. Crosby was his guide, philosopher and friend, and to him he looked for advice and direction.

The fact that Crosby had taken a keen interest in him, not alone because of an engaging personality, but for the added reason that Reed's father had been an intimate friend, did not conduce to Peck's happiness, either. The

latter felt that he was being subordinated to a favorite, and that his abilities and initiative were being suppressed, so that if he were content to stick to his present job, he would get into a groove and degenerate into a machine.

Peck believed that he had some ideas, perhaps not greatly original, but still ideas, but he felt that he would never get anywhere if he were continually denied the opportunity to apply them. He was young, healthy, ambitious and industrious, so he had about made up his mind to get out and seek another job, since he had nobody dependent upon him and he could therefore afford to take a chance.

He had been with the Benzinia Company three years, and before the advent of Reed he had acted more or less as an assistant to Crosby, but now he had been relegated to a secondary place in the confidences of the boss. However, as he had admitted to Reed, his close association with a man of Crosby's acknowledged ability had been of much benefit to him in the way of business training, and he hoped to

capitalize that experience in some other direction.

Two weeks had slipped by since he had been accused by Crosby of being unable to write copy that would sell dog soap and since, taking the reproach as an inspiration, he had been down to the rooms of the S. P. C. A. to get what he called "the dope on the dog market."

He had been busy during this period gathering information, and he had accumulated a mass of statistics. There were enough dogs—dogs whose owners esteemed them sufficiently to pay a license on them—to make him believe that he had found a market wide enough to dispose of millions of cakes of dog soap. Of course there were other considerations quite as important as the potential market: he must find a good soap and he had to secure money enough to finance the enterprise and to advertise the product. Just how he was going to surmount these difficulties, he had been unable to decide, but he was giving his problems thoughtful consideration when Crosby

stepped into his office, drew up a chair and sat down beside him.

Crosby had been somewhat more cordial to Peck since that day on which he had threatened him with dismissal. Just what had altered his attitude Peck could not imagine, but he knew that Crosby was a big man in many ways and not above admitting an error if he made one. It was sometimes difficult to convince him that he was wrong, but once convinced, he would apologize even to an office-boy if he had been unjust to him. Something had given him the impression that he had been a bit unfair to his advertising manager and he had attempted on one or two occasions to make friends with him, but Peck's laconic responses to his amenities had discouraged prolonged conversation.

Crosby sat for a moment gazing out of Peck's window; then he asked in a friendly tone:

"How are you and Reed getting on these days?"

"About as well as usual, Mr. Crosby."

"Peck," accused Crosby, with directness, "you don't like Reed."

"I don't dislike him."

"I don't dislike onions," said Crosby half impatiently, "but I never eat them voluntarily."

"Well," admitted Peck, with a faint smile, "the onion analogy about explains my feelings, I suppose. I fancy Mr. Reed is very agreeable outside of business, and there I might like him immensely. In business, I can't see him. Don't misunderstand me, Mr. Crosby; I have no intention of injuring him in your esteem, but you put a direct question to me and that called for a straight answer."

"That's all right, Peck. I wouldn't give a copper for a man who didn't have backbone enough to express an opinion if he had one, but are you sure that your judgment isn't biased....isn't there a little of the green-eyed monster lurking in the back of your—your prejudice?"

Peck was not fool enough to consider him-

self free from the little prejudices of human nature which so often color one's judgment, but if there were one thing which he tried to practise, it was fairness in his attitude toward others. He was a gentleman first of all, and it was his innate good manners and breeding that helped him get through college without any loss of esteem by some of his more fortunate classmates, in spite of the fact that he sometimes had to resort to menial work to pay his keep.

He had no illusions as to his own superiority and he had a habit of occasionally detaching himself from himself, so to speak, with the view of giving himself what he called "the once-over." He tried in those moments to discover his weaknesses, and while he was not always successful, he made an effort, when he found some outstanding fault, to correct it.

In his own mind he had catalogued his faults, but he could not bring himself to believe that jealousy was one of them. When Crosby, therefore, intimated that, possibly, envy was

at the bottom of his dislike for Reed, a wave of indignation sent the blood to his face.

Crosby noticed the change.

"What are you blushing for? Did I touch the spot?" he questioned good-naturedly, but without understanding.

"Mr. Crosby," began Peck, when he had in a measure mastered his resentment, "I may be blushing, but it isn't because you've touched the spot—unless the spot is my pride. Mr. Reed doesn't possess one qualification of which I am jealous—nor does any other man. I have my faults in common with everybody else, and if you had suggested that possibly I was foolish, or vain, or impulsive or—any other old thing—I might have let it go and thought that maybe you were right. But when you infer that I am jealous—a vice which I consider the meanest trait in human nature, born only of stupidity, why, then—then I feel that you don't understand me, and if that is the situation after my long service here, why, my prospects are—"

"Nonsense!" broke in Crosby, genuinely sorry that he had wounded Peck's feelings. "I had no intention of touching your pride. I merely asked you that to find out what was the matter with you. You seem to have had a grouch on for several weeks. I like you, Peck, and I don't want to see anybody around here unhappy. You have a good deal of ability, but that doesn't mean that you have a corner on all the genius in the world. There's no reason why you and Reed shouldn't get on; he has many valuable traits, and if you two fellows will pull together, we'll all be happier and more successful. If you don't, why...."

"I understand, Mr. Crosby. I never believed that I had a corner on any part of the world's genius. That's even worse than telling me that I'm jealous."

"Damme!" exclaimed Crosby, getting up angrily and pushing his chair back so violently that he almost upset it. "You're getting the swelled-head—or something has bitten you—I don't know what—"

"Dog bite, probably," smiled Peck, unable to resist his sense of humor.

"What do you mean, dog bite?" retorted Crosby angrily, not knowing what was in the other's mind and wondering if Peck meant deliberately to insult him. His gray hair fairly bristled as he walked back a step or two toward Peck.

"Nothing personal, Mr. Crosby, I was merely thinking of what you said about my copy—that it wouldn't sell dog soap, that's all. I'm sorry you misunderstood me," he added with a smile so genuine that Crosby's anger fled, too; he started to say something but changed his mind, and still smiling walked out of Peck's office.

Peck felt that he had handled himself creditably on this occasion. In the bottom of his heart he knew that he was not jealous of Reed. He looked at the situation from every angle and was sure of himself on that score. Then he began to think of Muriel. He wished that she had overheard the conversation. He let

his imagination run on pleasantly. She liked him, Reed had admitted that. Well, he would show her the kind of stuff he was made of. Then he wondered if she had spoken to the old man—scolded him, as she said she would do—and if that were the reason why Crosby had attempted to smooth things over? He hoped so. Now let the boss go back and tell her how he had stood his ground with dignified self-possession. If Crosby would only do that, Peck felt that the abject figure he must have looked the other day when she had overheard his call-down would be erased from her memory.

Liked him, did she? well, she was a darned pretty girl and a fine one, too—entirely too fine to be wasted on a prig like Reed. She had said that if he ever advertised a dog soap she would use no other. All right. Selling dog soap wasn't the loftiest occupation in the world nor the most romantic, but many a fortune had been made on meaner things; Crosby's, for instance, had been founded on

dentifrice, and when it came to an escutcheon, he would rather have a noble dog emblazoned on his shield than a tooth-brush!

CHAPTER VII

PREPARATORY to the launching of his craft upon the uncertain waters of trade, Peck realized that he must have some ready cash, especially if he acted on his resolution to resign his position immediately, so he began to take stock of his liquid assets. He had saved about $2,000, a sum which in former days would have lasted a young single man of frugal habits two years in a pinch; but to-day, with the cost of living over the high-water mark and still rising, he estimated that he might last twelve months on his bank-account before he began to present the appearance of decadent gentility.

Of course, he could continue in his present job and draw his $300 per month, putting in his spare moments toward the development of

his enterprise. To do this, however, would mean the dividing of his energies between his personal business and that of his employer, and he could not square that method of procedure with his conscience.

So he came to the conclusion that if he intended to take the plunge, he had better jump off, sink or swim. It was early summer and he should have his proposition shaped up by fall, when the migrating, dog-owning Manhattanites were returning to the city; so there was not any too much time to spare.

Running over these things in his mind, he closed down his desk one pleasant afternoon, about half an hour sooner than his usual quitting time and decided that he would walk up-town. So busy was he with his thoughts that when he looked around to see where he was, he found himself in the Forties, within half a block of his college club. The idea occurred to him to go there for dinner. At that season of the year there would be few members in the grill so he could select some

quiet spot in a remote corner of the large room and, undisturbed, continue his reflections as he dined.

He had just finished ordering and was about to spread on the table some memoranda, when some one called him by name from across the room. He looked up in surprise and a bit vexed at the intrusion, but his annoyance was immediately dispelled when he recognized the man who had hailed him.

"Hello, Dexter, what in the world are you doing here?" he called back.

"Dining—or going to—what did you suppose?"

"That was a fool question," said Peck laughingly, "but I haven't seen you for an age, so you took me by surprise. Expecting any one?"

"No, but unless you are, I'll expect you to let me buy your dinner—or, we'll match for it."

"You're on," said Peck, putting his papers in his pocket and going over to the other's

table. "How the deuce are you, Ed, and where have you been?"

Edmund Dexter and Junius Peck had been warm friends at college, as both of them had worked their way through. Dexter had made a wonderful record in chemistry and the promise he gave in his student days had been fulfilled by his later successes. Specializing in research work, he had, while employed by several large interests, developed various processes which had quickly placed him in the front rank of his profession.

Peck felt that this accidental meeting with the one man in all the world who could help him with his formula, but the last person who had occurred to him, was nothing less than providential. Fate seemed to have directed his steps that afternoon and led him to his goal.

It took Dexter a long time to recount his recent experiences. He was one of those slow deliberate talkers who seem to weigh every word before it is uttered so as to be reasonably sure of his statements. But Peck, who was

the reverse type, quick, active and somewhat impulsive, was not the least impatient. What Dexter had to say had such important bearing on his own plans that he was too much interested in the story to interrupt him.

Dexter, it seemed, had been employed by some large oil interests for the purpose of obtaining, if possible, an increase in the production of gasoline. Then the United States got into the war and he had tendered his services to the government and his offer had been accepted. While working in the government laboratories he had hit upon a process for the saponification of mineral oils, but before he could confirm his discovery, along came the Armistice and his services were dispensed with. Subsequently he had worked in his own laboratory where he had verified his process to the point where every vestige of doubt had been removed. Now he was shaping his plans to capitalize his discovery; that was what had brought him to New York.

"You mean to say," asked Peck eagerly,

"that you can take mineral oil—crude petroleum—and make soap out of it?"

"That's just one of the things I can do."

"Have you got the process patented?"

"Not much; I don't intend to give it away by doing anything so foolish. The process is a secret one and I intend to keep it so; that's better than a patent."

"Do you think, Ed," inquired Peck, displaying a degree of emotion that seemed altogether inordinate considering the obviously trivial question, "that a soap made by your process would cure mange?"

"Mange?" repeated Dexter, surprised both at the question and at his friend's apparent seriousness, "mange? What the deuce are you talking about?"

"Never mind what I'm talking about, I'll get to that later. What I want to know is, do you think that a soap made of crude oil would cure mange?"

"I'm no veterinary," laughed Dexter, "but

if crude petroleum has any value as a hair-restorer and a dandruff cure—and the tonsorial sharps swear by it—why, a soap made by my process should certainly prove an effective cure for mange, as mange, I imagine, is merely a sort of dog-dandruff. Or course, I should have to investigate—"

"That's enough," interrupted Peck, extending his hand to the astonished Dexter, "shake, old man. I've got what I've been looking for. I'll show you what to do with your discovery!"

He reflected a moment and a sudden doubt came into his mind.

"Say," he asked, "nobody has ever before been able to saponify crude-oil?"

"Not to my knowledge. You're in the soap business, and you ought to know all about the so-called benzine soap your concern is selling. You are aware, of course, that its base, like that of all other similar soaps, is animal fats. The content of benzine would be immeasurable by the time the soap got to the dealer's shelves. I should say that so far as its advertised

virtues are concerned they are purely psychological."

"We won't argue about that. It's a good soap, nevertheless, whether the benzine stays in it or not. But if you've found a way to make a water-soluble soap out of crude-oil, I'll say you've *got* something! And now I'll tell you why I wanted to know of the curative properties of such a soap, so far as they related to that noble animal, that faithful friend of man, the dog. Come on, let's have our coffee served in the library and I'll reveal the big idea in three minutes."

CHAPTER VIII

PECK'S three minutes were prolonged into almost that many hours. The late afternoon wore into evening and the evening had dissolved into night before he had disclosed to the patient but somewhat incredulous Dexter his Big Idea.

Peck went over the whole situation. He recounted his unpleasant interview with Crosby, some weeks before, and how his employer had in a moment of temper hurled at him, as a parting shot to a disagreeable session, the rude imputation that he lacked the ability to write advertising that would sell dog soap. Peck told how he had smarted under that taunt until, in a flash, the possibilities of marketing a really good dog soap had revealed themselves. The more he pondered the sub-

ject the greater the opportunity seemed, until he had come to believe that Crosby's words bore apocalyptic significance. Nobody had up to the moment advertised a dog soap with the seriousness that characterized the marketing of other household necessities, so here was a field that was absolutely virgin. It was not only an opportunity but an actual discovery!

Everything pointed to the success of the venture. The potential market was not only great but growing. There were millions of dogs being bred every year and these were sold or the fanciers wouldn't go on breeding and advertising them for sale.

Step by step Peck led Dexter over the field of his investigations until he brought him to the point where there were but two difficulties to be surmounted: a formula, which was the more important, and the financing of the enterprise. As to the formula, hadn't Dexter actually walked into his arms with the formula in his vest pocket?

Was the whole idea anything less than an

inspiration? Hadn't the whole sequence of events pointed that way?

Of course, Peck had carefully omitted from the details leading up to his decision the incident of the lady in the case. He would not even let himself believe that in the shaping of his plans, romance had taken a hand, too. Had anybody intimated such a possibility he would have resented it as a reflection on his business judgment, if not his sanity. Yet, in spite of himself, Muriel's personality kept intruding itself into his schemes. He had frequently of late pictured himself as a successful manufacturer in possession of all the large and small luxuries that attend prosperity, and in all of those pleasant dreams, Muriel was somewhere in the picture.

Well, every man must have some incentive to urge him to success, and usually the influence wears skirts. It may be wife, sweetheart or mother, but there is usually a petticoat somewhere, be it ever so far in the background. Primarily, the desire for success may be

founded on selfishness, but once achieved, no success may be enjoyed to the full unless it be shared by another.

So, while Peck was careful not to allude to Muriel when he told his story to Dexter, the fact that he was conscious of the part femininity had played in his plans was evidenced by this very omission, since her presence in Crosby's office had added greatly to his embarrassment and acted as a spur to his resolution never to rest until he had vindicated his ability.

Dexter had listened patiently, but he seemed to regard Peck's scheme as fanciful.

"My discovery," said he, "is too important to be wasted on anything so trivial as a dog soap. We ought to get into the business in a big unrestricted way."

"Limited!" exclaimed Peck. "If you think the dog market is limited, take a walk up Broadway or Riverside Drive any afternoon, rain or shine and look at the parade of the mutts. Say," he added, "did you ever read *anything* so unscientific as O. Henry?"

"I have read him, occasionally," admitted Dexter smilingly.

"Ever read one of his very short stories called 'Ulysses and the Dogman'?"

"Not that I remember."

"Well, you read it. It was written some time ago, but it fits the present perfectly. In that story he tells how the male population of this burg is leashed to the other end of all sorts of dogs—lean and fat, long- and short-haired, beribboned, overfed, wheezy quadrupeds. He calls this army of pup-promenaders victims of modern Circes, with never a Ulysses to rescue them, for these men don't relish their jobs, but are simply a woman-bossed aggregation who have bowed to the inevitable through long years of matrimony.

"He calls them 'flunkies to Fido, bellboys to bull-terriers....toddlers after Towzer....dry nurses to dogdom....cur-cuddlers, mongrel-managers, Spitz-stalkers, poodle-pullers, Skye-scrapers, Dachshund-dandlers, terrier-trailers and Pomeranian-pushers.'

"We might add to his alliterative list such late arrivals as Chow-chasers, hound-handlers and police-dog propellers, for no flat seems too small to accommodate these great beasts of the wilderness who have been transformed into household pets."

Dexter chuckled over this, but he wasn't fully sold on the idea, and it was some time before Peck had won him over to a compromise.

Dexter agreed, in the event that Peck was successful in forming his company, to put in a certain number of hours a week in the laboratory. He would not disclose his formula, but he would compound the soap-mass which was to form the basis of the product, and the rest any soap-maker could do. In return for this he was to get a drawing account—the amount to be fixed later—and some stock in the company. If the business were successful, his interest and his pay were to be increased, and if the enterprise eventually justified it, he would devote his entire time to it and then he would reveal his formula.

They were preparing to go home, Dexter half sorry that he had yielded to Peck's enthusiasm, and the latter in a happy frame of mind which would have been unbounded joy but for the fact that the now important matter of finances seemed as distant as ever, when Fate again took a hand.

At the coat-room counter a gentleman was just in the act of depositing his hat and stick. As the late comer faced about, there was a moment of mutual recognition and then a hearty round of hand-shaking. The new arrival was Mr. Thomas Pemberton, classmate of both Peck and Dexter. Pemberton was the scion of great wealth and was noted at college for two things: his ability to spend and his willingness to mix. In other words, he was both a sport and a democrat—the term democrat in this instance relating to his indifference to class distinctions, not his political faith.

Pemberton had studied for the law and had obtained his degree, but as far as his friends knew he had never practised at the bar—unless

it was that bar to navigate which requires no master's certificate; but even there he was not enough of a devotee to worry much over the approach of absolute prohibition.

In fact, Pemberton could not stick long to anything without feeling the need of a change. Constancy in any direction to him meant boredom. He had a good mind, which, had he been forced to use, would undoubtedly have developed under the lash of necessity. So he toiled not, neither did he spin, but because of his dislike for any sustained effort, he was no profligate, either. At the moment when Pemberton met his two classmates, he might be described as a drifter, without even the saving grace of any particular vice.

"I thought everybody was out of town," said he. "I just dropped in here in desperation. I've been to two shows and seven cabarets without meeting a soul I knew. Say! I'm glad to meet you fellows—come back and sit down a while—it's only eleven o'clock, the night's young and warm and I'm thirsty."

Dexter and Peck put up their hats again and followed Pemberton to the grill room, where they sat at one of the small round tables and discussed old times. The conversation drifted from the reminiscent stage to the present, Dexter told of his work and his discovery and Peck disclosed his Big Idea, but in concentrated form, and when he had finished his story he asked Pemberton what he was doing.

"I," said Pemberton, lighting a cigarette, "am out of a job."

"You never were in one, were you?" laughed Dexter.

"Not exactly, I suppose, in the sense you mean. I was six months in France, but just as the war was getting interesting, they pulled the darned old Armistice. Since then I have been holding down the hard job of trying to convince the governor that I require an annual income, and until last week I managed the difficult work with fair success."

"And now?" questioned Peck.

"Day before yesterday he handed me a

check and his ultimatum. The check was for $100,000, and the ultimatum was in effect that when the cash was gone, so was I. I was to take that money and get into business—any business, so long as it was legitimate. If I made good I could have more; if I didn't, I could investigate the bread-line, where, the governor intimated, I should probably find many congenial acquaintances and where I could gratify my democratic proclivities. As to the family name, he hoped, if I got to the hobo stage, that I should still have left sufficient decency to change it, so it would not get on the police records; but if not, the family name could go with me to the dogs!"

"Dogs!" exclaimed Peck, leaning forward, "you don't know it, old man, but you *said* something, that time!"

CHAPTER IX

IT WAS well after midnight when the triumvirate parted company.

Pemberton also had succumbed to Peck's eloquence and had agreed to finance a company to manufacture dog soap, to the extent of half his bank-account.

Peck told him that $50,000 was by no means sufficient, but that it would do as a beginning, for with so much real cash he could manage to get through with what he could borrow at the bank and his credit with publishers and other advertising concerns, who would undoubtedly grant the new company extended payments.

Pemberton's confidence in the scheme was fortified by Dexter's association with it, and that individual had begun to look upon the

enterprise as less chimerical as soon as he saw prospects of real money behind it. Pemberton had taken long chances all his life and he was willing to gamble again, aside from the fact that the idea presented to his mind various humorous possibilities. Here was a chance to get even with the governor by taking him at his word. How his father would storm when he discovered that the aristocratic name of Pemberton was to be associated with the soap business—and dog soap, at that! Even should the enterprise prosper beyond Peck's expectations, that fact would scarcely reconcile him.

Well, his father had declared that he would be satisfied if his son engaged in any business, as long as it was legitimate, and there was nothing off-color about this. Young Pemberton smiled as these reflections came to him, when he parted for the night from his prospective business associates.

A meeting was arranged for the following evening at Pemberton's bachelor apartment,

where the details of organization were to be considered. Peck announced that he would hand in his resignation the following day, so that he would be free to devote his time exclusively to the formation of the new company. He walked home to his lodgings in a state of exaltation over the rapidity with which events had shaped themselves during the evening. It did not take him long to get into bed, but sleep was out of the question. Many problems would require solution during the next few weeks and these passed in rapid review before his active mind. The more he courted sleep the wider awake he became, until in desperation he arose, lit his pipe and sat at the open window, giving free rein to his thoughts.

Dexter had said that on the morrow he would look up some scientific data on mange, so that when he came for the conference the next evening he would be in a position to state definitely whether he could produce a soap which would cure the disease.

Peck recalled this statement and he began to wonder whether he had worked too fast. Hadn't he taken too much for granted? He knew that it would be business suicide to market a soap which was advertised to do a specific thing and in the end to find that the article possessed none of its vaunted virtues. Fakes had been successfully exploited in the bygone days of patent medicines, but ill people were easy victims. If a man died in spite of the patent nostrum he was taking, it was too late for him to complain about it; if, on the other hand, he got well, he was apt to attribute his recovery to the marvelous virtues of the medicine. Psychology played a big part in that sort of thing, but if a dog were afflicted with mange or fleas, there was no psychology about that. He wasn't dealing with the patient; the owner of the dog would buy the cure, and if it worked the result would be visible; if it failed, the failure also would be self-evident.

But aside from all this, Peck was not the

sort of man who would willingly lend himself to fraud. He wanted a good preparation, knowing that something of real value was the only thing that would endure.

Had he worked too fast? Possibly, but then he knew that Dexter was a careful individual and he did not believe that he would have permitted himself to be even partly associated with the scheme unless he had already come to the conclusion that his soap would do the work, or that he could produce one that would.

Well, it was too late now for regrets, so he decided that one of the first things to be done was some intensive experimenting. Dexter's soap must be tried on the dog—a real, live, mangy mongrel. That would tell the story, and if there were any doubt about the efficacy of the soap, he would go experimenting with other dogs and more soap until he had developed something that he could unhesitatingly stand behind.

Then he thought of his promise to resign

the next day. Was that wise?.....perhaps he had better first be sure that he had the formula. Then he began to speculate on the wisdom of wasting time on a dog soap. Why not jump in and make a laundry soap which would have Crosby's product boiled to a finish? But to do such a thing would require a million dollars and he had only last night admitted that fifty thousand wasn't nearly enough for a dog soap.

No, the smaller venture was the safer; if that prospered it would be an easy step to the larger enterprise. Besides, Crosby had taunted him with the charge that he couldn't successfully advertise a dog soap, and he was going to show that self-opinionated gentleman with what facility he could handle such a proposition. Yes, everything seemed to point to the dog soap as an inspiration; there wasn't any doubt about it. Success in that venture would be a great personal triumph.....it would make Mr. Reed look ridiculous in the eyes of Muriel....she had heard that challenge, too

.....she had said that if he were to advertise a dog soap she would use no other....it was a pretty little tribute to him, offered as a mark of her confidence in his ability....or—good lord! was it pity? Confound it, he *would* make a go of that dog soap! He owed it to his dignity and his self-respect.

Peck put up his pipe and turned in. It was four in the morning before he fell asleep. For three hours he dreamed of dogs; they were tramping all over him; he was literally buried beneath an avalanche of dogs and he was being eaten alive by fleas. At seven o'clock he was suddenly awakened by a prolonged whine. He sat up with a start only to find that his alarm clock was sounding its usual reveille.

CHAPTER X

AT THE office, when he had disposed of his morning's mail, Peck settled himself comfortably in his swivel-chair, cocked his feet on his waste-basket and proceeded to dictate his resignation to Miss Stuart. That young lady, being altogether in ignorance of his intention, was surprised when he began:

"Dear Mr. Crosby:"

He paused, and she sat curiously expectant.

"Did you say, 'Mr. Crosby'?" she ventured by way of a reminder.

"Yes, but never mind, I'll give you the letter later."

Miss Stuart gathered up her papers and showed her disappointment by the hesitant manner in which she arose to attend to her typing. She half suspected what was in Peck's

mind, and she was burning with curiosity to find out if her suspicions were correct.

Peck had looked forward to dictating his resignation with pleasurable anticipation. This was to be his big moment, when in black and white, he could tell Crosby in polite language what for so long he had been forced to suppress for fear of losing his job. He had intended to rattle off the letter with glib ease, in one well-turned sentence after another. The phrases were to flow from him naturally, in the manner of an accomplished letter-writer who could dash off the most important compositions with extemporaneous facility.

Of course, he had been thinking over what he intended to say for the past two hours, but Miss Stuart would never guess that.

At the moment of his triumph, however, reason intervened. This was no time for grandiloquence or bombast. There was no occasion, his better judgment told him, to make the old man sore. He had, until recently, been a liberal employer; moreover, he was the

father of....well, it was good business to keep on friendly terms with him and the dignified thing to do was not to dictate the resignation at all but to write it in his own hand and to couch it in language that would leave no sting. Crosby was a big man in spite of his little eccentricities, and could, if occasion arose, he useful to him; there was nothing to be gained in antagonizing him beyond the gratification of a little personal vanity. He might need Crosby some day, while the latter would, in all probability, never need him. So judgment getting the better of heroics, Peck wrote in long-hand:

DEAR MR. CROSBY: I am tendering to you, herewith, my resignation as advertising manager, the same to become effective, if convenient to you, on the 1st. proximo.

I am leaving to go into business on my own account, and in severing my connection with your Company, I hope you will believe that I do so with genuine regret, since I shall be denied, hereafter, the benefits I have always derived in a business way from personal association with one whose genius and commercial ability are as great as yours.

With many thanks for your various kindnesses and courtesies, I am,

Sincerely yours,

JUNIUS PECK.

Peck read the letter twice, and feeling that it was diplomatic and in good taste, sealed it in one of his personal envelopes, called Miss Stuart, and asked her to lay it on Crosby's desk.

She took the envelope and looked at Peck questioningly.

"Yes," he smiled, "you guessed right."

"You mean you have—resigned?"

Peck nodded affirmatively.

She walked slowly toward Crosby's office but stopped at the door.

"Not going in the dog soap business, are you?" she asked.

"Right," said Peck, "and I'll take you along if you'll go."

Miss Stuart made no reply, but Peck could see by the movement of her head as she passed

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through the door that her attitude was one of disapproval.

That afternoon Crosby walked into Peck's office with the letter of resignation. He seemed surprised, and, although the letter had apparently greatly pleased him because of its complimentary reference to his ability, he did not urge his advertising manager to remain.

Crosby was the kind of man who never did that sort of thing. If anybody in his employ desired to leave it, he would give the man or the woman, as the case might be, every opportunity to reconsider the step, provided the person were a desirable employee, but he never begged any one to stay.

"I'm sorry you're going, Peck," he said, "and I wish you all the luck in the world. The dog soap business doesn't seem to me as though it had great possibilities, but you say you've looked into the matter carefully, so you ought to know.

"It strikes me as funny that an offhand remark of mine should have started you on

that trail, but sometimes little accidents reveal great truths. If you make good, nobody will be more pleased than I, and....if you should happen to fall down....well, my boy, don't hesitate in that event to come to see me."

Crosby held out his hand and wished Peck good luck again. "If I can help you in any way," he said, "call on me."

Peck thanked him and was glad that he had yielded to his better judgment in framing his resignation.

He rang for Miss Stuart, and had just finished outlining his plans to her when Reed came bustling in.

"Say, old man," he said with a show of profuse cordiality, "the chief has just told me the news—congratulations!"

"Thanks," said Peck, accepting Reed's proffered hand, but without rising.

Miss Stuart, who was wise in matters of office etiquette, made a movement to leave the room, but Peck motioned her to remain, so she resumed her seat. There was no other chair

in the office, so Reed had to remain standing. Possibly Peck had reckoned on this as a means of choking off his associate, whose joy seemed inordinate.

"Going to manufacture dog soap, eh? Hanged if it isn't a unique idea. Did you really get the notion from that remark the old man made that day we had the argument?"

"I suppose I did," said Peck. "Think it a good scheme, do you?"

"Good? why it's corking. I don't see a chance for failure. You'll put it over beyond any question of doubt. Well," continued Reed, casting about for some place to sit and not finding one, "I just came in to be the first to congratulate you, and to say that I'm with you. Any little thing that I can do, you know...."

One of the office messengers came in and reported that Miss Crosby was in the anteroom inquiring for Mr. Crosby.

"I'll be with her in a moment," volunteered Reed, "ask her to wait."

He moved toward the door, then turned and said to Peck:

"Say, this will interest Muriel; don't you want to tell her?"

"No, you'll tell her."

Reed passed out of the office, not quite sure whether Peck had made a request or expressed an opinion.

"Mr. Reed seems delighted, doesn't he?" remarked Miss Stuart innocently.

"He is," said Peck. "It would be a terrible disappointment to him if I were to change my mind and stay here."

"Why, I thought you and he were good friends?"

"Well, we're not what you might call pals."

"You mean that he was not sincere in his good wishes?"

"Listen," said Peck with mock confidence, "I'll let you into a secret: if he thought that I had dug up a gold mine or an oil well, he'd manage to be sick in bed so that he couldn't congratulate me. If he believed that I had

landed a bloomer, he'd be the first person to tell me what a clever little fellow I was. He thinks this dog soap business scheme is a nut idea and that I'm the prize boob in seven states. I'll bet a month's salary to a Mexican paper dollar that he's telling Miss Crosby right now all about my original comedy sketch and laughing himself blue in the face."

And he was.

CHAPTER XI

MURIEL listened to Reed's recital, but she did not join in his hilarity.

"I don't see anything so surpassingly funny," she said. "It seems to me that Mr. Peck has been goaded into leaving. He was very rudely spoken to, I recall, that morning when I happened to overhear what father said to him. He's intellectual and sensitive...."

"One can not afford to indulge in sensitiveness when he's on a salary; sensitiveness is a luxury for the rich."

"Sensitiveness," said Muriel loftily, "is an attribute of genius."

"Genius is sometimes a mild form of insanity."

"If that is true, Wesley," said Muriel, smil-

ing sweetly, "I should say that you need never fear the terrors of a padded cell."

"Thank you," said Reed with a sweeping bow.

"It seems to me that you are displaying a very unfriendly spirit when you laugh at what you believe to be another person's impending failure. Possibly Mr. Peck may succeed; father used to think a great deal of his ability."

"Nobody could possibly regret his failure more than I, should that occur. But this dog soap proposition—and especially the way the idea came to him—strikes me as quixotic; it's positively ludicrous."

"There's never anything funny in failure," said Muriel. "But I have confidence in Mr. Peck's sanity and I believe that he'll succeed. Tell me," she added, rising to take her departure, "do you expect father back this afternoon?"

"I don't know; he left no word as to when he would return."

"Well, I shan't wait. Where is Mr. Peck's office? I want to wish him good luck."

Reed told her, and she left with a brief good-by.

Muriel found her way to Peck's little room, but its occupant was gone and his desk was closed.

Anticipating that, possibly, he might have to face Muriel after Reed had given him what Peck termed "a boost in reverse English," he had hastily cleared his desk and left for the day.

Before he went he had succeeded in persuading Miss Stuart to cast her lot with him, and that young lady had yielded; more because of personal regard for him than from any firm conviction that the move was a wise one.

That much settled, he felt that something more had been accomplished, as his secretary had been with him for three years and he knew that in the shaping of his new enterprise she would prove a valuable aid.

Muriel was evidently disappointed that

Peck was out. She looked for some note-paper and finding a memorandum pad on a small table, where also were some plain envelopes, she sat down and wrote:

DEAR MR. PECK: So sorry to have missed you. I came to extend my congratulations. I know you will succeed. You remember my saying, jestingly, that if you ever advertised a dog soap, I should use no other?

I shall stick to that promise, and you may consider this an order for one dozen cakes of —what is to be the name? Moreover I shall recommend it to my friends. I shall be tremendously interested in watching your success —and you are going to make a success of it.

Won't you come to see me? We shall be back in the city, permanently, after the fifteenth of September.

Cordially yours,
MURIEL CROSBY.

After dinner that night, Muriel casually referred to Peck's leaving her father's employ.

"How did you know?" he asked in surprise.

"Wesley told me, this afternoon."

Crosby nodded; then after a moment he said, quizzically:

"You seem to be mightily interested in that young man."

She made a grimace to cover a blush, forgetting that they were sitting on the piazza, in the dark.

"Not particularly," she replied, "I thought you considered him a capable man....he is, isn't he?"

"First class."

"Then why don't you try to keep him?"

Crosby narrowed his eyes and drew at his cigar for a moment before replying:

"I'm always willing to call the other fellow when I'm sitting behind a large stack, with an ace in the hole."

"An ace in the hole?"

"I forgot," he laughed, "that bridge was your game; that was a poker expression."

"You mean that he was bluffing?"

"Well, he might have been."

She made no reply, so Crosby amplified his meaning:

"You see, my dear, if a man is dissatisfied

with his job, or thinks he's underpaid, why, he can't push his resignation at me and expect to get away with it. When a fellow is in that frame of mind, I'm not getting my money's worth, because his efficiency is below par. If he demands a raise and gets it, he is sure to feel that he's been cheated in the past and that makes him no good in the future. I try to be just, to look out for his interests and to advance him without having to be urged to it. But the minute a fellow hands me his resignation, no matter for what reason, he's through."

Then he added after a pause, with a pugnacious stiffening of the jaw:

"Yes, and I guess they all know it, too!"

"Even," questioned Muriel, "if the man's indispensable?"

"There's no such animal."

"Well, then, invaluable?"

"Yes, even if he's invaluable. But Peck isn't invaluable; he's smart, honest and industrious, but I can replace him."

Muriel took another tack:

"Wesley thinks he is sure to fail."

"Wesley doesn't know it all, either."

"Then you think he has some chance of success?"

"It struck me first as a fool idea, but I hear that he has interested young Dexter in the proposition, and he's an excellent chemist. I'm told, too, that there's some Pemberton money behind it—they've got millions, you know—so with a good formula and sufficient capital to try it out—well, it's fifty-fifty."

"Then, dad," said Muriel earnestly, "why not try to interest both Mr. Peck and this—er—Dexter man?"

"Interest them in what?"

"In staying with you. If Mr. Peck's idea is good enough for the Pembertons to back, why not take it up yourself?"

Crosby reflected; he seemed to be wavering, but finally he said with emphasis:

"No, I'm hanged if I will!"

CHAPTER XII

THE conference at Pemberton's rooms disclosed to Peck that strenuous days were before him. It was a good deal easier to talk about starting a new enterprise than to do it, and in this instance the details were largely up to him.

Hours were spent in discussing the kind of organization to be formed, and when that was thrashed out there still remained the important factors of package, name, costs, selling price, factory, office and sales force, not to mention advertising plans and, that most important of all preliminaries, trying it on the dog, himself.

It would require several weeks at least to bring into tangible form all the loose ends that entered into a going organization.

The surprise of the evening proved to be Pemberton.

His wiry hair grew soft and silky

Peck had regarded him as a sort of animated check-book, but, unexpectedly, he displayed a degree of keenness which proved that while an excellent mind had been going to seed, it was not beyond redemption, and his legal education apparently had not been altogether wasted.

Possibly the spur of necessity had pricked his latent talents into action, or maybe the desire to show his father that he was not altogether an ass had vitalized his energy, but whatever the reason, the fact remained that, much to his delight, Peck began to believe that he would find in Pemberton a valuable aid instead of a necessary but purely ornamental attachment.

Pemberton even assured his friends that, given a brief period in a law library where he could brush up a little, he should be able to draw up the incorporation papers, saving the new company that expense, at least.

Dexter had not taken much part in the discussion. He had smoked a pipe and, owl-like,

peered through his horn-rimmed glasses, replying to questions in laconic sentences.

During a lull in the conversation, he had fished into his coat and produced a small cake of some brownish substance which he laid solemnly on the table.

"What's that, chocolate?" asked Pemberton.

"Try a bite," suggested Dexter.

Pemberton lifted the substance to his nose, took one sniff and hastily laid it back on the table.

"What did it die of?" he asked.

"Your soap, Dexter?" Peck inquired, picking it up eagerly.

"Yes; I made it this morning."

"And this is the stuff that will do the trick, eh?" said Peck, examining the specimen critically and handling it as though it were a precious gem.

"I think so. I find," said Dexter gravely, "that mange is caused by a parasite: *Sarcoptes* —or *Demodex* or allied genera. They live in the hair follicles and burrow in the skin of the

animal affected. Sheep, too, have mange; in that animal the disease is called 'scab.' "

"Union sheep, I suppose, are immune," observed Pemberton.

"Sheep!" exclaimed Peck enthusiastically, "say, that opens up another wide field."

"What did you say was the name of the follicle?" asked Pemberton, grinning. He had been serious for two hours and the strain was beginning to wear on him.

"I said the parasite was called *Sarcoptes*, not the follicle," corrected Dexter seriously.

"Thanks," said Pemberton. "Cute name, isn't it? Might be a new cult; sounds like a Greek hero or an Egyptian cigarette."

"And this preparation," inquired Peck, ignoring Pemberton's witticisms, "you say will kill those germs?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And fleas, too, of course?"

"Certainly."

"We'd better prove that, hadn't we?" remarked Pemberton.

"Oh, yes," said Peck, provoked that his reproving glances had no effect, "you haven't such a thing as a flea about you, have you?"

"Rotten oversight, old dear, not a flea in the house."

"Well," said Peck, "we'll appoint you a committee of one to acquire a few for to-morrow evening."

"Isn't the time a trifle short?"

"Get up an hour earlier and make friends with a homeless dog."

"Never had much experience with dogs; I'm a bear, though, when it comes to goats."

"Goats?" repeated Dexter, in surprise.

"Yes, Doctor, goats. If this adventure of mine gets to the governor's ears, I'll get his—by wire."

But the discussion again took a serious turn and it was agreed that the three should meet nightly at Pemberton's rooms until Peck could devote his entire time to the business.

Pemberton saw his friends to the door.

"This is serious business, fellows," he said.

"You bet it is," agreed Peck.

"What I mean is, that should we fall down, I'll be as homeless as the 'Wandering Jew.' "

Peck laughed. "You'll be homeless, eh? Well, I imagine your governor will at least house you over the garage. If we fall down, there's a park bench waiting for me."

"Listen, old top," said Pemberton, "when it comes to pedigree, the governor can dig up a family tree that would make the Pilgrim Fathers look like recent arrivals at Ellis Island. No guest was ever able to break through the ivy-clad portals of our baronial castle who was not, at least in some remote degree, related to that gang of Bolsheviki who stuck up King John. I don't know what he'll say if I make good in this enterprise....I may be permitted to wish him a Merry Christmas over the telephone....but if I fail, I'll be as popular in his house as a silk hat at a soviets' council."

When Peck arrived at the office next morn-

ing, the first thing that caught his eye was an envelope addressed to him in a feminine hand, with which he was unfamiliar.

Instinctively he felt that it was from Muriel, but he tried to put the thought out of his mind as rash optimism. Why should she write to him? On the other hand, stranger things had happened, perhaps she had. Of course, he could have settled the question instantly by opening the letter, but like a youngster who saves the choicest bit of candy for the very last bite, he went through all his other mail, in order to prolong the pleasure of anticipation as long as possible.

When he did finally read the note, his spirits rose like bubbles in a siphon. Here was a cordial expression of friendship and sympathy, rather than mere evidence of polite interest, for really, she need not have written him at all. The fact that she had indicated she thought of him in the friendliest sort of way.

Previously, he had looked upon Muriel as a desirable but impossible acquisition to his list

of lady friends. Not that he felt himself below her, for as a matter of fact he came of stock as good as, or possibly better than, the Crosbys. But she was behind a barrier of wealth which to one in his position seemed insurmountable. Now the fence seemed less forbidding; at any rate, she had deliberately let down some of the bars.

These pleasant reflections induced a buoyant mood in which there was little zest for work.

Never before had the world appeared so roseate. A moment ago he had thought the office insufferably hot; now the exhilarating wine of spring was in his blood. A drab little sparrow chirping on the window-sill of his office took on the colors of an oriole and sang like a nightingale. He usually permitted himself but one cigar after breakfast, but he promptly lit a second from the glowing butt of the first. Nothing mattered to-day. His good morning to Miss Stuart was so exceptionally cordial that she wondered at the expanse of his smile.

Going out into the main office he overtook Reed, and as he passed him, he slapped him on the back with a cheery "Hello!"—a degree of familiarity which Peck had never previously indulged in.

Reed was astonished at the demonstration, but he responded cordially enough, wondering what had occasioned this sudden outburst of geniality.

All morning Peck was in a state of exaltation, and when it came time for luncheon he was without appetite.

In the afternoon he sat down to the pleasant task of replying to Muriel's note. He had thought about it all morning. He prided himself on his vocabulary and his diction, but he wrote and destroyed six letters, before he finally achieved one which he felt was a fair example of clear-cut phraseology.

On his way home, however, he thought of fifty apt and clever phrases which were better than any he had used; but the letter had gone.

CHAPTER XIII

THE days slipped by until the end of the month had arrived and the time had come for Peck to weigh anchor, cast off from the safe harbor of Certain Income and take his untried craft out upon the shoal-waters of New Ventures, where, according to statistics, ninety-five out of every one hundred adventurers are wrecked upon the rocks of Failure. But he was a bold navigator, so he said his farewells around the office, packed up his personal belongings and left.

Some weeks before, he had gone to the usual rendezvous about eight o'clock in the evening. There he found his confrères seated in the middle of the room, deeply interestd in watching a famished and dispirited mongrel bolting huge hunks of meat from a platter on

the floor. So absorbed were his friends that neither of them looked up at the approach of their associate.

"Introduce me," said Peck.

"I beg your pardon, old man," said Pemberton, taking the dog by the ear, "Milton, meet our president, Mr. Junius Peck."

Milton, however, had more absorbing business before him, so he permitted his rubber-like ear to be stretched but managed to keep his nose in the platter.

"Rotten manners," commented Pemberton, "but otherwise a good chap."

The dog was a sad-eyed, grimy, emaciated, bob-tailed specimen of canine dejection. How he had ever escaped the dog-catcher was a mystery. He was a mixture of many breeds, but represented none in particular. Bald in spots and flea-bitten he looked the battle-scarred veteran of many a back-alley fray, while the small remnant of string still attached to what was once a tail told the story of a recent encounter with the small boy.

"What is it?" asked Peck.

"Dog," said Pemberton, "what does it look like?"

"Like some prehistoric reptile."

"Just plain dog, that's all."

"I'll say he's plain, all right."

"Cost five dollars," said Pemberton airily.

"Five dollars!" gasped Peck.

"And fifty cents, to be exact—fifty cents to the kid who was tying a can to him and five to the superintendent of this building to let me bring him up-stairs."

"What's the idea?" asked Peck.

"Patient," volunteered Dexter, "you wanted a subject to experiment on, didn't you?"

"Good lord! you don't expect to restore that ruin, do you?"

"Well," said Dexter, "if I do, you'll say it's a fair test, won't you?"

"That wouldn't be a test."

"What would you call it?"

"A miracle!"

For a fortnight or more, Milton was coddled like a prize Pomeranian. Under a course of treatment by Pemberton, which included daily ablutions in the kitchen sink, and over which particular function Dexter presided, administering appropriate applications of his soap, Milton became gradually transformed into an animal whose genus at least, if not his breed, no one could longer doubt.

His wiry hair grew soft and silky, the bald spots disappeared and his lack-luster eyes took on a lively glint. If he had possessed all the caudal appendage with which nature had originally endowed him, he would have wagged it gleefully at every approach of his two friends, but a continuous vibration at the end of his vertebra indicated to those gentlemen that he was grateful and was endeavoring to demonstrate that fact to the best of his limitations.

Peck had been too busy of late, ending his connection with the Benzinia Company, where he was breaking in a successor, to watch the

interesting experiment he had insisted on. He had worked every night so as to leave nothing undone, but on this, his last day, he had arranged a little dinner at the club at which Pemberton, Dexter and he were to celebrate the occasion of his leaving.

They did not linger long over their cigars and coffee, as Peck was anxious to have a look at the dog.

When they reached Pemberton's apartment, they were greeted by a series of staccato barks from behind the closed door.

"He's lively, anyhow," commented Peck.

"You'd be lively, too," said Pemberton, inserting his latch-key, "if you had eaten six square inches of Oriental rug."

"And he still lives?"

"Yes, but the rug has passed away."

As they entered the apartment, the dog raced madly around the room, alternately fawning at Pemberton's feet and jumping up at him in an endeavor to lick his face.

Peck gazed at the animal in astonishment.

"You don't mean to say that's our patient?"

"That's Milt," said Pemberton.

Enthusiastically Peck offered his hand to Dexter:

"I'll say you're some little chemist—shake!"

"How about your miracle?"

"It's nothing less."

Pemberton got out the cigars and they sat down to talk over things generally.

"Don't blame all this transformation on the soap," said Pemberton, indicating the dog, "I have a theory of my own."

"A theory?" questioned Peck uneasily.

Pemberton leaned back comfortably in his chair, blew a few smoke rings and nodded affirmatively.

"Shoot, Professor, let's have your theory," said Peck.

"I don't want to knock your soap, Doc.," said Pemberton, looking at Dexter, "but the situation is this:

"The dog came into our hands practically starved. His sides were literally glued to his frame. Now, in that condition, every time he breathed, he caused a friction to be set up between the inner epithelial layers of the epidermis and his ribs, and this process, going on for a long period, wore off the roots of the hair, destroying the follicles and causing the hair to fall out—see?"

Dexter stared at him in silent amazement.

"Marvelous!" said Peck, "go on."

"Well, in addition to that there was a chronic vacuum in his abdominal region, and the air pressure against this vacuum pushed in the hair at that point of his anatomy, causing the baldness there."

"An epochal discovery," said Dexter, wiping his glasses. "You should write a thesis on it for the Bureau of Animal Industry."

"Probably I shall. Now, as soon as the dog was properly fed, why the vacuum disappeared, the friction ceased when layers of fat were formed between his ribs and the inner skin,

so the hair took root and—presto! it grew again!"

"Immense!" said Peck. "Between the bone and the skin you say, a layer of fat was formed which caused the hair to grow?"

"Precisely."

"Now I know," said Peck, "why you have such luxuriant hair."

"No," objected Dexter drily, "according to his theory, the perpetual vacuum should have made him bald."

"Your ungentlemanly personalities in no way upset my theory," said Pemberton. "My hair is luxuriant because it is nurtured at the roots by an abundance of gray-matter."

"Watered, you mean," corrected Peck.

Meanwhile the origin of all this persiflage lay comfortably coiled on the best Oriental rug, an occasional twitching of the muscles, accompanied by low whines, indicating that he was dreaming of those dark, unlicensed days when life was just one garbage can after another.

CHAPTER XIV

THE tang of autumn was in the air before the new company had arrived at the stage where it was ready for business.

Weeks had elapsed in which little appeared to have been accomplished, but much in reality had been done.

A location had been found on lower Broadway from which the soap could be distributed and where also the offices of the company could be located, the neighborhood being contiguous to most important points in the city.

What required most time was the selection of a corporate title and the name of the soap; the latter was, of course, the more important, but the first problem seemed more difficult to settle.

Peck was for a personal, rather than a general title.

"The public, I believe, has more confidence in a new concern," said he, "when it bears the name of some particular person, since men, as a rule, don't lend their names to enterprises unless they are willing to assume a certain amount of responsibility."

He had suggested that Pemberton's name be used, but that individual declined the honor.

"I'll be in bad enough," he objected, "when the governor learns what I'm doing, without aggravating the situation by throwing his name to the dogs in the bargain."

Dexter, too, had refused the use of his name for "professional reasons"; so as Peck was to be the moving spirit of the enterprise, it was finally settled that the corporate title should be the "Peck Company."

Pemberton had made good his promise to file the necessary papers, which were so drawn that the charter was broad enough to permit the company to engage in such lines as were allied to the soap industry.

Pemberton had shown no signs of weaken-

ing. He had declared his intention of making his office with the Peck Company so that he could assume some of the burdens of management, and he accordingly did so.

After a great deal of discussion over the proper size and shape of the package, the color of the label, general design, carton, price and how the product was to be distributed, the question of a name for the soap came up for argument.

"Why not advertise for a name?" suggested Pemberton. "I've seen that done several times and it appears to be successful."

"That would be all right," said Peck, "if we had enough money to play with; aside from that, however, a scheme of that sort would upset my advertising plans.....no, that won't do.....I'd like to find a coined word —something that would, in a measure, express the purpose of the soap, though that isn't imperative."

He explained that a coined word was the only kind of trade-mark name that was regis-

terable nowadays in the Patent Office, but that after all, registration meant really nothing but establishing priority of use. It was no protection to receive a certificate of registration, if, after getting it, somebody turned up with the same name unregistered, but who could prove that its use antedated that of the registrant.

"Then what's the use of registration?" asked Pemberton.

"Not much, except for two reasons: we need registration in this country if we desire protection in foreign fields later on; then it's an announcement of intention to use a certain name for commercial purposes. If the same title is already in use, but has not been registered, the fellow using the name is likely to call your attention to the fact and save you a lot of trouble and expense later on."

"I'll have to read up a bit on trade-mark law," said Pemberton; "I don't know much about it."

"Nobody else seems to," laughed Peck;

"but go ahead and read up on it, because if we happen to hit on something which hasn't already been preempted, we'll be in luck. You're likely to have your hands full anyhow, one of these days, chasing pirates, if we make a winner of this thing."

"How would 'Dexterite' do?" suggested Pemberton, after some thought. "That sounds good and it's a little tribute to our esteemed associate."

But the esteemed associate objected.

If he were going to lend his name to something, he said, it would have to be bigger and more important than a cake of dog soap.

"Well, let's abbreviate it," offered Pemberton as a compromise; "how would 'Dexol' do?"

"We're getting nearer," said Peck, "that isn't half bad....I've got it—we'll call it 'Dexo'; that can't be offensive to our friend here and it possesses the added advantage of having only four letters, which makes it easy to handle in copy. It's short and snappy and

not hard to remember. How does it strike you fellows?"

There was no objection and so the name Dexo was adopted.

"When are you going to start your advertising?" asked Pemberton, one day after Peck had got his sales force together, and practically all of the other details preparatory to the firing of the opening shot in the campaign had been completed.

Pemberton was intensely interested by this time and he was curious to try his new toy of business.

"I'm not going to begin the advertising until we get the stuff pretty well distributed," said Peck.

"You mean you're going to place the soap on sale, generally, before you advertise it?"

"Certainly. To advertise ahead of the distribution would only mean that if people called for Dexo and couldn't get it, they would be sold something else. We'd be building up trade

for the other fellow. Advertising can only establish a demand, and if the demand can't be filled, why your money's wasted. Many a good thing has landed in the morgue that way."

"All right, professor, you know the game and I don't, but for the love of Mike! get busy; I'm dying of curiosity."

Peck smiled, but in order to quiet Pemberton he disclosed to him some of the plan of campaign. After Dexo had been fairly well distributed, he would run some "teaser copy" for twenty days, to stimulate public interest, keep the crowd guessing and to make it easier to complete the distribution of the goods.

"Do you really think that you can arouse any interest in this blasé burg?" asked Pemberton incredulously.

"It's easier to arouse in this burg than anywhere else on earth," said Peck. "Curiosity is a trait that dominates the race. Even you just admitted that you were burning with it. Everybody has an element of it in his nature.

It's at the bottom of all progress. That fable of Eve and the apple was founded on a profound knowledge of human nature; she had everything in the world but the apple and she was willing to risk even her salvation to find out what that was like. All of Bluebeard's wives died for the same reason."

Pemberton agreed that there was something in the argument, but still he was doubtful about surfeited little old New York.

"The more people you find in a community," argued Peck, "the greater the proportion of curiosity you'll find there. It's merely a sum in addition. Did you ever see those busy boys who hurry into a quick-lunch beanery, grab a sandwich, bolt it like starved wolves, then race out like railroad trains, only to stop half-way to their offices and stand for fifteen minutes on the street watching some guy riding up to the tenth story of a new sky-scraper on a steel girder?"

"Yes, I have," laughed Pemberton.

"Well, curiosity made those fellows pause

when the laws of health couldn't. You call this town blasé? Say, this is the easiest place in the country to start something in. The most palpable faker can stop traffic in this big, sophisticated city, when he couldn't attract a corporal's guard in Jaytown. I don't mean to say that the gaping mob is all native; but the mob is here, and when you find a mob it usually gapes."

Peck toiled for many nights before his advertising plans were perfected, and, following closely the method he had decided on, he got his product well placed before he sprang his surprise.

It was no easy matter to put a new article on the market in advance of the advertising, but he was persistent with his salesmen, and so, little by little he got Dexo into enough stores to insure its being supplied to the average person who called for it as a result of the advertising.

He worked many schemes to get this distri-

bution before it was accomplished; fired many a man and hired many another in his place. He retired late in the night after many a hard day in which he had visited store after store and talked himself hoarse, leaving a box of Dexo on the counter as a gift if he couldn't sell it.

Pemberton accompanied him on many of these excursions, filling his smart roadster with cartons of soap. There was nothing of the snob about him; he rather enjoyed the experience. It was the first real work he had ever done and he was beginning to feel a new thrill, the pleasure of which increased as he went along.

CHAPTER XV

ONE morning, New York awoke to find a four-inch, triple-column space on one of the local pages of its morning paper, devoted to an illustration showing the head of a nondescript dog and one cryptic word:

When New York went to business that morning, regardless of the means of transportation it used—subway, elevated, surface cars or bus—the same mysterious announcement

stared the passenger in the face; and those who walked found it on the bill-boards. It was in the afternoon papers, and the theater crowds discovered it in their programs.

For five days the enigmatical announcement appeared in nearly every local advertising medium, keeping the reading public of five boroughs guessing.

The young hopeful of many a family asked mother what it meant, and she put it up to father who in turn puzzled his brain for an answer only to give up the riddle in despair.

"What is this 'woof'?" some strap-hanger would ask his fellow sufferer in the subway, pointing to the card in the car.

"Guess it's some new musical show, don't you think?"

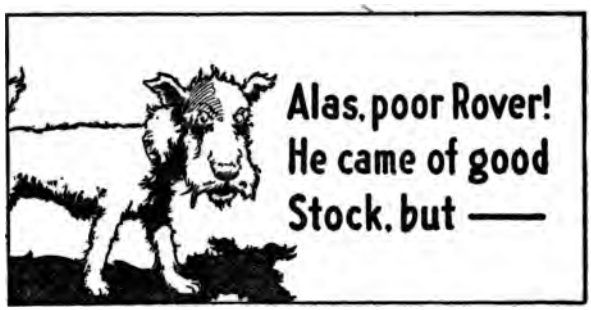
"Probably a new breakfast food."

"Yeah, I guess that's right."

By the fifth day "woof" became a topic of much conversation, and many a wiseacre was

ready to prove that his guess was right and some of them made bets on it.

On the sixth day the announcement was changed. The dog emerged a little nearer the center of the space and the text read:



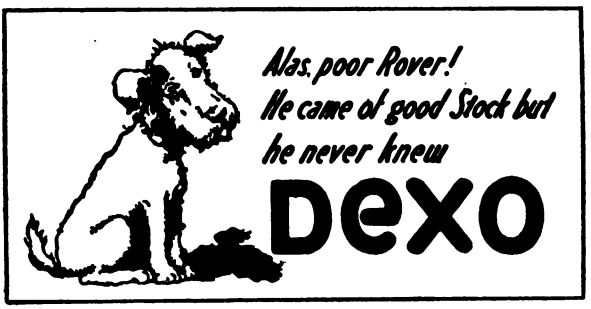
This abstruse statement was even more mystifying than its predecessor. It disclosed nothing to the curious, but it did, to some extent, upset the calculations of the cocksure who felt that they had guessed the answer to the riddle.

The only thing that identified the second announcement with the first was the dog—it was the same dog, only more of him.

The second advertisement ran for five days

also, when it was followed by another, which was scarcely more edifying than the previous two.

This time the whole dog was pictured—a sad-visaged whelp, and the legend ran:



And still the mystery grew. What was Dexo? A dog biscuit? This guess was the most popular in the betting.

But the truth somehow had leaked out in places; probably through the composing room of some of the publications which ran the advertising or through the lithographer's where the labels were printed. Of course, as soon as the name appeared, those store-keepers who had stocked the soap immediately guessed

the meaning of the mysterious announcements, and, priding themselves on their wisdom, slipped the information to their friends and customers with an ostentatious show of superior knowledge.

The fourth advertisement appeared five days later and was somewhat more informative, though some there were who still could not fathom the mystery. This time the dog was pictured with a satisfied smile, apparently enjoying the luxury of a bath. He was covered with a creamy lather and the phrasing ran:

The series of "teaser copy" had run for twenty days and on the twenty-fifth, the first

installment of regular copy made its appearance. It told in effect, that Dexo was a petroleum soap that would make dogs clean, healthy and good-tempered, that it was to be had at all druggists' and that the price was twenty-five cents.

The advertising had cost a good deal of money for the short period it had run, but as Peck put it, and Pemberton and Dexter agreed, it had "rung the bell."

Nearly everybody who could read in the Greater City, knew of Dexo and knew that it was a dog soap.

Peck followed up his first series with plain text, but not exactly of the conventional type, being a combination of sales argument and humor. The message he tried to convey was that a good dog deserved to be kept in good health, that Dexo would keep him healthy by keeping him clean, and that if he were clean and healthy he would remain good-tempered.

In discussing his advertising plans with his associates, the question arose as to whether a

straightforward sales argument were not better than a humorous appeal.

"I don't pretend to know the least thing about advertising," said Dexter, "but I was always of the opinion that you fellows took the business of advertising rather seriously."

"I don't know how others feel," said Peck, "but as for myself, I take the business seriously enough—that is the business of getting results—but I always try to get the public's frame of mind, which, usually, isn't serious."

"Then you believe that the funny stuff gets over better than the serious appeal?"

"Wait a minute: there's a difference between slap-stick comedy and humor. I never try to get funny in the vulgar sense. My theory is that the average American is a light-hearted individual. He went to war with a song and he died smiling. He doesn't take anything too seriously—not even death. He prefers ragtime to classical music, a jazz band to a symphony orchestra. For every serious play that gets across, twenty comedies make good.

The newspapers with the largest circulations are those with the comic supplements. Millions are spent every year for humorous magazines, and when the tired—or tiresome—business man seeks relaxation he hunts up a musical comedy.

"Nobody but the morbidly curious or a hypochondriac turns first to the mortuary notices in the morning paper.

"Now the difference between a good-natured, humorous appeal and a cold, serious solicitation in print, is the difference between a smiling, agreeable salesman who tries to get your order by soft persuasion, as against the fellow who wants your business and means to get it pleasantly if he can, pugnaciously if he must. Both methods may succeed, but the first fellow is generally the more welcome."

Peck paused a few moments for breath and then he continued:

"Why do you buy a newspaper or a magazine—for the reading matter or for the advertisements that it contains?"

"For the reading matter, of course," said Dexter, "I'm not much interested in advertising."

"Of course not—and you, Pemberton?"

"Same here."

"Well, then the chances are that you won't read an advertisement unless you are seeking for something you wish to buy?"

They both agreed that this was true.

"But if you were reading a magazine, for instance, and your eye caught a picture to which it was attracted because of a humorous touch, you'd very likely scan the text, and if that interested you, too, you'd probably read the advertisement through, wouldn't you?"

"I presume so," admitted Dexter, who seemed to be the one addressed.

"Well, if in that way you learned a single fact about something you would ordinarily never have been interested in, wouldn't the advertisement have performed its function?"

Dexter agreed that this was true.

"But would he necessarily buy the article advertised?" questioned Pemberton.

"In all probability he would, if he needed the thing. The nature of the advertisement wouldn't stop him, would it? Look here: what advertisement can you recall this moment?"

Pemberton thought a moment.

"'Gold Dust,'" he said.

"Good! The 'Gold Dust' copy is humorous."

"But I never bought any 'Gold Dust.'"

"Of course not, but I'll bet there is some of it in your father's moated grange. The important thing is, however, that you remembered 'Gold Dust' because of the antics of the Twins; but for that bit of humorous advertising you wouldn't have remembered the name of something for which you would not have any personal use."

Pemberton conceded that possibly this was so, but he wasn't sure.

"What advertising do you recall, Dexter?" asked Peck.

"Sunny Jim," said that antithesis of flippant gaiety.

"Ah! the personification of cheerfulness, and that's been off the boards for ages."

Dexter thought that it was still running in the magazines, but he wouldn't bet on it.

"You two fellows read this morning's paper?" asked Peck.

They had.

"What advertisement can either of you recall?"

Neither could remember any particular one but they both surmised that all the principal department stores were advertised.

"That answers it," said Peck decisively, "if one of the many ads in the morning paper had lured a smile from either of you, you would have recalled it."

"Probably so," admitted Dexter, and Pemberton nodded assent.

"Well," continued Peck, in defense of his system. "I'm no high-brow psychologist, in spite of my college training, but I do know

enough about human nature to feel reasonably sure that most people like to be amused and that if you can get a person in a good humor, you are more likely to do business with him in that state of mind than if his mood is passive or indifferent."

"I guess that's right," agreed Pemberton.

"Nobody cares a hang about Dexo," Peck went on. "We think they do because we are interested parties. Now if we can interest others by the addition of a little humorous twist to our advertising, why we've done something, son, and don't you forget it!

"Yes, sir, you may take it from me that people with no sense of humor are only half human, mostly thick-headed, generally bores, hard to convince and therefore tough customers. The great majority of people in this land are fun-loving individuals who spend a proportion of their money for amusement and those are the sort of people who will buy our stuff.

"I don't mean to say that everything should

be advertised in a humorous way; but soap—dog soap in particular—doesn't require any heavy artillery, sales argument to move it. But even a serious business, such as selling coffins, I notice is transacted in cheerful surroundings.

"The meat-ax method may work effectually with some people, but most of them yield quicker to subtle persuasion.

"And now, having delivered myself of that oration on humorous advertising, I'm going to work. Get out of here—both of you!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE response to the advertising was even better than Peck had dared hope for. The limited stock on the counters of the drug trade, where Dexo had been generally placed, disappeared and unsolicited orders began to come in over the telephone and by mail. Then there came a lull, which, of course, was to be expected. The real test would come when the people who had bought their cake of soap had consumed it and liked it well enough to re-order.

"What I should like to do," said Peck one morning to Pemberton, "is to pull some unique advertising stunt that would liven things up again for a few weeks."

"It appears to me that we're in about everything that takes advertising; I don't see what more you could do."

"Oh, I mean something spectacular—something big and different—but not necessarily expensive. We've gone the limit in conventional advertising and we can't go much farther until business begins to come in."

"Well, you ought to be able to pull something out of that multiple-cylinder brain of yours."

"I have an idea," admitted Peck, "but....I don't know, maybe it's wild."

"Let's have it."

"Well, I was thinking that if I could manage to get, say ten dogs—mournful and mangy mutts like Milton was before you adopted him—I could start something. My idea was to get ten store windows in populous sections, fill the windows with a display of Dexo and put in the dogs as a central attraction. Then I would have cards printed reading, for instance: 'Watch Dexo Make the Hair Grow'.....but .....well, I don't know—"

"Why not? There's nothing impossible about that scheme."

"Gettings the dogs is one problem; then there's the question of windows. I don't believe it would be easy to find ten people who would be willing to house a dog for about two weeks—and a mangy one in the bargain."

"You could find them if you were willing to pay the price."

"That's it. We can't afford to pay Ritz rates for a dog hotel; but even if the scheme did cost $500, it would be cheap, because I believe I could squeeze $5,000 worth of publicity out of it—the kind that money can't buy—provided, of course, I could properly stage the play."

"Let's have the whole story, I'm getting interested," said Pemberton, drawing up his chair nearer to Peck.

"You know Robinson?"

"Robinson—on the *Sphere?*"

"Yes; he's doing special articles for the Sunday magazine supplement."

"Yes, I know the gentleman to the tune of fifty bucks."

"Fine! so much the better! Now if we can pull this display with live animals, we'll get him on the job to write up the story. He'd probably be glad to do it to square himself with you, but he's alive—I've worked with him and know—and he would instantly see the humorous possibilities in a story of that sort. He could easily get it over with his paper and at the same time grab a little coin on the side for himself."

"All right, I'll see Robinson, what else?"

"The dogs."

Pemberton reflected for a moment and then said with sudden inspiration:

"You get the windows and leave the dogs to me."

"You'll get the dogs?" questioned Peck incredulously.

"When do you want them?"

"You mean that? How—"

"I'll get 'em," said Pemberton, grinning. "I haven't fallen down yet on any of my promises, have I?"

"No, old top, you've been an ace."

"All right, when do you want your troupe of performing lizards?"

"I'll let you know later. If you'll lend me your roadster, I'll jump out this afternoon and try to line up some windows."

"Take it."

When Peck anticipated trouble in securing window space for his dog show, he did not overestimate the job. But as Pemberton had said, you can get anything if you're willing to pay the price, especially in New York.

After two days of hard work, Peck came into the office one morning and announced to Pemberton:

"I've got the windows, and your boat is down-stairs."

"Ten of them?"

"No, I could only land five, and I had to cover them by a deposit, so it's up to you to get the dogs, or we're out of luck—and a hundred bones."

"All right, what's the delivery date?" asked Pemberton, nonchalantly flecking the ash from a cigarette.

"Monday morning—that's three days off, can you do it?"

"I'll have fifty for you to choose from."

"What are you planning to do, rob the pound?"

"Leave the details to me," said Pemberton, mysteriously.

He walked over to his desk, and, after a few moments' reflection he wrote the following:

WANTED: Ten dogs, any breed, age or size. Will pay $25 cash each for two weeks' use. Will be kindly treated and returned to owners if desired. Dogs with mange preferred. Call with animal at 322½ Broadway, Room 511, Monday 9 A. M.

He marked the advertisement for Saturday's insertion, made two copies, called a messenger and directed him to deliver one copy to each of the afternoon papers with the largest circulations.

On Monday morning when Peck arrived at his office he found the entrance to the building blocked by a mob. Hastily concluding that there must be a fire, a fight or a suicide on the premises, he forced his way inside, almost losing his coat in the crush.

When he got through the door he found himself in the midst of a mad throng of human beings, entangled in a howling, snarling, snapping, barking, whining bedlam of dogs.

Dogs of every breed, color and condition—"mongrels, puppies, whelps and hounds and curs of low degree." Some of them had broken away from their custodians and were chasing other dogs, being chased in turn by their respective and frantic owners. Dogs were snapping at the legs of frightened tenants who were scrambling to reach the elevators or to get out of the building.

Women were holding their short skirts close to their nether limbs, crying out excitedly and begging for protection; the elevator starters were swearing and the runners were laughing.

Outside, the excitement grew until the crowd extended to the middle of the street and blocked vehicular traffic. Then somebody told a policeman that a maniac with suicidal tendencies had broken loose in the building, and the officer, butting his way inside, hurriedly told another policeman to call for the reserves.

Suddenly, the truth burst upon Peck: Pemberton!

He looked about in dismay, and there sure enough was Pemberton, swinging a light bamboo cane in his gloved hand. He was standing three or four steps up the marble staircase that flanked the elevators, where he could calmly survey the excitement without getting into it.

He caught Peck's eye, and, doffing his hat, saluted with a wide, extravagant flourish. Beside him stood Robinson, rapidly making notes. Then the patrol wagon clanged up to the building and a flying wedge of bluecoats, with drawn revolvers and nightsticks, forced

their way inside and drove out people and dogs.

It was ten o'clock before complete order was restored. Explanations had to be made to the police, but they were hard to satisfy; their dignity had been insulted and they were going to make an example of somebody. Robinson, however, helped square matters with them, but it was different with the superintendent of the building. The other tenants, he said, were outraged, the whole proceeding was a disgrace and the Peck Company would have to get out. A ten-spot, surreptitiously slipped to the irate autocrat by the diplomatic and resourceful Pemberton, put him in a more receptive frame of mind and he promised to be lenient.

"Well," said Pemberton, when he and Peck and Robinson finally got up-stairs to their office, "I delivered the goods, didn't I?"

Peck was moved by too many conflicting emotions to reply. He sat down wearily and stared at Pemberton.

"It'll make a great story," said Robinson enthusiastically. "Of course, you know that I can't mention Dexo or the Peck Company, but leave it to me to make the inference unmistakable."

"It'll be a great story," said Peck sadly, "if we survive it."

"You haven't answered my question," insisted Pemberton, grinning. "Did I deliver the goods?"

"You played hell," said Peck.

Then he began to see the ludicrousness of the situation.

"I'd forgive you, you jackass, if we had only saved five of them. Our scheme is knocked cold, now."

"Oh, no, old dear," replied Pemberton lightly, "I picked out five doggies—beautiful wrecks—on the sidewalk, before the reserve divisions began to arrive. I suspected that they would begin to turn up early, so I got down at eight-thirty, and made my selections."

Peck looked at Pemberton in amazement.

"You did?" he questioned incredulously. "Where are they?"

"I've got them locked up and well chaperoned in a cellar around the corner. Come on, I'll show 'em to you. Robinson is going to put over this story in to-morrow's paper, and he'll do the other for the magazine when you have pulled your hair-raising stunt; this account is merely a preliminary—a sort of introduction."

"Right-o," nodded Robinson.

For a moment Peck stared in silent admiration at the smiling Pemberton.

"Tommy, old sport," said he, "as a press-agent, I thought I was somewhere in the money, but I want to say to you that my best work, compared to this amateur effort of yours was merely elemental—shake!"

CHAPTER XVII

PECK accompanied Pemberton to a basement in a side street, where he found a quintette of mongrels, tied up far enough apart to preserve order, or, more specifically, to prevent an attack on each other.

A colored trooper still in khaki and wearing two gold service stripes was in charge of the situation. He held an instrument of correction in the form of a broom handle in his fist and he was seated on an empty box facing his charges when Pemberton and Peck entered.

"Boss," said he, getting up and offering his rod to Pemberton, "I is sho' glad yo' come; them animals ain't dogs, they's hy-e-nias. Believe me—"

The dogs set up such a babel of noises that the rest of the sentence was lost.

When some semblance of order had been restored, Pemberton asked the soldier if he were going to throw up the job.

"I ain't no quitter, boss," he said seriously, "an' I'se much obliged fo' a chance to make two bucks, but hones', mister, them houn's done give me mo' trouble then cha'gin' a machine gun nes'—an' fleas! Good lawd, mister, I 'spects I gotta go get deloused all ovah 'gen!"

But he was promised five dollars for the day and a lucrative, steady job later, so he reconsidered his resignation.

"What's your name, Percy?" asked Pemberton.

"Da's it—how yo' all know mah naim' Pussey?"

"I'm a mind-reader," said Pemberton, chuckling over the fact that his little joke had turned on himself.

"Yo' sho' is some mine-reader," said Percy, regarding the feat as nothing short of

miraculous, and instantly feeling the greatest respect for Pemberton's uncanny ability.

Peck looked over the exhibits critically.

"How do you like 'em?" queried Pemberton proudly.

Peck mournfully shook his head in disapproval.

"I'm afraid they won't do."

"What's the matter with them?"

"They're what you said they were, 'beautiful wrecks,' but they are all damaged below the water line."

"Below the water line?"

"Yes. If the public is to be asked to watch the work of reconstruction, the repairs should be made on their superstructures, where the public could see what was being done without standing on its head."

"I see....well, you should have specified 'baldheads and barebacks.'"

"Oh, I'm not blaming you, only it's too bad that they're all bare-bellied. I don't see how

we can use them. No," Peck added disconsolately, "I'm afraid they won't do."

"Say," exclaimed Pemberton enthusiastically, after thinking the matter over, "we can fix 'em so they *will* do."

Peck glared at him defiantly:

"Look here, as a fixer, I'll say you're entitled to a congressional medal, but will you please tell me how in the name of Helena, Montana, you're going to fix *this?*"

"Calm yourself, Junius. Yonder dusky crusader has given me the idea—I might say the inspiration was derived from an association of ideas."

"Never mind how you got it, what is it?"

"A razor."

For a moment Peck did not see the connection, but all at once it dawned on him.

"A razor....you mean to shave spots on them to imitate mange?"

"You've got it."

"You're crazy. That would be a palpable fake."

"I'm perfectly sane and I deny that it would be a fake; neither would it be palpable."

"What would you call it?"

"A touch of realism....a bit of local color."

"It's a fraud, no matter what you call it and I wouldn't be a party to it. You couldn't fool the people, either. We're in business to stay and any fellow who expects to stay in the game and goes on the plan that he's dealing with a sucker public is riding for a fall."

"Now look here," argued Pemberton, taking Peck aside, "I'm no more of a fraud than you are, and I guess that what you say about the public is true, but you'll admit, won't you, that if those dogs had real mangy spots on their hides such as I propose to create artificially, that such damage could and would be repaired by Dexo. Is that so?"

"Well, go on."

"You will also admit that, after a great deal of labor and expense you have prepared

the stage—five stages, in fact—for a dog show, and that one of the cleverest press-agents—meaning Robinson, not me—is going to put over a big story in to-morrow's paper which is to preface a bigger one in a magazine?"

"I admit all that."

"Well, the public will read to-morrow that some of these dogs will be exhibited about town, and the dear public is going to look for them. You say that the people must be denied this pleasure because the dogs are moth-eaten in the wrong place, and I agree with you that far. On the other hand you've got to go through with the play or we fall down all along the line and your magnificent scheme is still-born just because you get a sudden attack of purity.

"I disagree with you in your statement that the public will be humbugged, because Dexo *will* do exactly what it *seems* to be doing to our horrible examples. Therefore, any one buying a cake of Dexo to restore the hair on a seal-

skin muff, will be out a quarter; but the good lady who wants to cure Fido of premature baldness as the result of pleasant but indiscreet association with low characters outside his social set, will get her money's worth and will be willing to write you a testimonial to that effect."

"You should stick to the law," said Peck, "with a little practise you could make a pick-pocket look like a philanthropist."

Pemberton pointed out that all the dogs happened to be of the short-haired variety and that if the razor were deftly applied, the deception would be complete.

Peck was in a hole with his pet scheme, so he finally yielded, but with many misgivings. They would try the experiment on one dog and judge from the way that one looked what the chances were against the discovery of the hoax.

Percy was let into the secret. As Pemberton had surmised, he was provided with an African machete, so with the aid of some soap he plied the blade according to instructions in the

half-light of the basement. The dog was then taken out into the street and inspected. The operation was a decided success and Peck began to take a more cheerful view of the situation, but his conscience still smote him.

Percy was hired to attend to the dogs. He had been discharged from the service and was therefore open for an engagement. The fact that he was going to be employed by a mind-reading magician overcame his prejudices against the character of his occupation.

He was equipped with a white duck suit and cap, the latter bearing the legend "DEXO" in gold letters, and the next day he, with Peck as driver, delivered his charges in Pemberton's car to their respective destinations. He was instructed as to their care which was to consist of a daily washing of each dog in his particular show window, after which the dog was to be exercised in the street for half an hour. Peck saw that the windows were properly dressed and placarded, and that sawdust was on the floors so that the dogs would be comfortable.

On the day which marked the dressing of the windows and which was the one following the excitement on Broadway, Robinson's article appeared as a headliner and it proved its author's ability as a handler of copy. Moreover, other morning papers ran an account of the laughable incident and the joke on the police, and the afternoon papers wrote it up, too.

Of course, there was no mention of Dexo, but every one knew what was referred to by "a well known and cleverly advertised dog soap," there being no other dog soap advertised.

Peck felt that so far the scheme had worked perfectly, but he gave the credit for it to Pemberton, who refused to accept it, saying that it was Peck's idea, only he had elaborated on it.

The window displays attracted much attention.

As a matter of course, the hair grew rapidly on the dogs, just as the placards stated it would do, so in the course of a fortnight those

who were interested in watching the experiments began to conclude that Dexo was the greatest hair-restorer of the age and so bought it not only for their dogs but for their heads.

All this was highly satisfactory and Peck was in splendid spirits, having by this time eased his conscience of the part he had played in the deception, when a visitor walked into his office one day and awoke the memories he was hoping to forget.

The gentleman's card bore no indication of his business, but Peck had him shown in.

He proved to be an investigator for the Vigilance Committee of the Associated Advertising Clubs.

This individual was polite but insistently curious. He desired to know whether Dexo had actually caused the hair to grow on the mangy hides of the dogs as had been advertised, or if, perhaps, some other agency were responsible; was Peck absolutely sure no fraud had been perpetrated?

Peck had a bad half hour with the gentleman, who stated that he would be compelled to bulletin the member clubs of the Association, warning them of the fake—if it were a fake; he had to do this as the organization was composed of the largest advertisers in the world, that their motto was "Truth" and their motive the smoking out of the faker and the exposure of the impostor. Peck, of course, must be familiar with all this for hadn't his own company been a member of the Association when he was with Benzinia?

Peck decided to fence no longer. He came to the conclusion that he would out with the facts, so he told the investigator the whole story. The humor of it saved the situation, and when Peck satisfied his visitor that Dexo was no fraud, but that it would really do what was claimed for it, he was permitted to escape with the warning that he should hereafter stick to the truth in his advertising or abide by the consequences.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE story Robinson wrote in the magazine section of the *Sphere* turned out to be an excellent advertisement for Dexo, in spite of the fact that no mention was made of that preparation by name.

Beginning with a photographic reprint of the ad in the want-column of an afternoon paper it related how that innocent inquiry had started an incipient riot on Broadway, which, before it was quelled, necessitated the calling out of the police reserves; the story, replete with appropriate illustrations of the dogs in the windows, ended with a reference to the "promoters of a dog soap who have resorted to novel methods to attract public attention."

"Robinson certainly made good," said Peck enthusiastically to Pemberton, on the morning

following the appearance of the story. "You can afford to call it square on the fifty."

"He doesn't owe me fifty."

"You don't mean to say he paid up?"

"No, I don't; he owes me a hundred now."

"Go on! touched you for another fifty, eh?"

Pemberton smilingly nodded assent.

"Well," said Peck, "I guess the story's worth it to the Company; charge it up."

But Pemberton objected. He maintained that the Company couldn't afford to pay that expense any more than it could in its present stage afford to pay him a salary. He had not been drawing anything because he still had some means of his own and he wanted to give the infant enterprise a chance to grow out of its swaddling clothes. If things continued to improve he meant to draw a salary later on, at which time he would also collect the hundred. If the business wasn't going to succeed, to draw any unnecessary funds out of it would only hasten the end. Anyhow, he argued,

since it was all his money he would only be taking change out of one pocket to put it in another. So the matter ended there.

Two or three days later, Peck found a pink envelope on his desk, addressed to him in a bold feminine hand. The writing was familiar, so this time he did not hesitate to open it.

The letter was from Muriel, congratulating him on the story in the *Sphere*, which she referred to as a masterpiece of advertising.

"Even father," she wrote, "has admitted that you *can* advertise a dog soap, so your revenge was swift." She closed by calling his attention to his failure to fill her order for a dozen cakes of soap, so she was attaching her check for $3, under the impression, she said, that possibly her credit was doubtful, which, perhaps, accounted for her failure to have her order filled. "Send it to our town address," she concluded, "as we are back for the season."

Peck read and reread the letter. Why, he asked himself had she been so careful to add

that she had returned to the city for the season? There was no doubt in his mind, so he smiled with the satisfaction of a young man who is making good and who feels that his position will soon be established to the point where he can meet the daughters of the opulent on an equal footing.

She had asked him to call in the first note she had written him, but he had hesitated to accept the invitation then. Now it had been repeated, subtly, of course, but anybody with half an eye could read the inference in the last line of her letter.

There was no reason why he should not call now. The diffidence he had felt when he was in Crosby's employ, or when he was just emerging from that state of servitude, had disappeared, and with the success that was beginning to mark his venture had come a degree of confidence and self-assurance that was new to him.

It did not take Peck long on this occasion to frame the following reply:

DEAR MISS CROSBY: Indeed you may congratulate me, but whether I deserve your approval is a horse—or shall I say a dog?—of a different color.

I'm afraid that Mr. Crosby's admission that I can advertise dog soap is rather a doubtful compliment; I can't quite decide whether he meant to commend my genius or to express his opinion of the sum total of my ability. I'm returning your check with my apologies; your credit is good—for anything I have. My failure to send the soap was an oversight, so I shall ask you to accept the dozen cakes with the compliments of the Peck Company, and by way of atonement for my inadvertence, I should like to have the pleasure of making the delivery in person, day after to-morrow evening. May I?

Sincerely yours,

JUNIUS PECK.

A telephone call from Muriel the following afternoon informed Peck that she would be delighted to receive him, and her cordial manner left no doubt in his mind that he was progressing in the direction of that young lady's esteem.

Pemberton came along just after he had

hung up the receiver, with a bit of news. He drew up his chair to Peck's desk and slapped him on the knee.

"Old man," he began, "I've got a surprise for you."

"Shoot! I hope it's pleasant," said Peck, but with so bland a smile as to indicate that nothing short of a calamity could possibly spoil his good humor.

Pemberton, too, was smiling.

"I met the governor last night," he said, "for the first time since he handed me his ultimatum and my final stake."

"No!"

"Yes."

"Well....did you tell him?"

"Everything."

"And?"

"Naturally, I expected him to go into convulsions or calmly to order the butler to throw me out, instead of which he took me clean off my feet by patiently listening to my story and then, what do you suppose?"

"I haven't the slightest idea?"

"Telling me that he had been in touch with my movements all along, and, by Hector! he *was* fully informed. That was the reason he had sent for me."

Pemberton related the result of his interview.

The old gentleman had changed his entire view-point. He had come to the conclusion that he had been living in a little world of his own, hedged in by century-old prejudices and permitting himself to harbor class hatred which had no place in this day of democracy. It was such obsolete ideas, he was beginning to see, which were in a large measure responsible for the terrible war. Caste was a thing of the past. Courage was the noblest trait of human nature and that quality was not restricted to gentlemen, so called. Men from the meanest walks of life had risen to the noblest heights of heroism in the defense of the Republic and that was enough for him. Pride of family was commendable enough, but when that was car-

ried too far, as he was afraid he had done, it was un-American, and when carried to its logical conclusion it was not far removed from the Prussian idea of Divine Right. There was also an aristocracy of labor and it was quickly taking a dominant position in the affairs of State; those who refused to recognize the new order of things were lulling themselves into a sense of false security from which they were doomed to a rude awakening.

"He went so far," concluded Pemberton, "as to state that he believed that my attitude toward the average man was the proper one and it proved that I possessed a degree of vision which was far in advance of his own. What do you think of that?"

"Sounds like rabid socialism, doesn't it?" asked Peck with a smile.

"Coming from the governor it's almost revolutionary."

"Did he send for you?"

"When I got to my rooms last night I found a message requesting me to call him on the

phone. I didn't know that the folks had returned to town. When I got him on the wire he asked me to come to dinner. To tell you the truth, I was afraid to go; I framed half a dozen excuses but he wouldn't listen to any of them. Well, I knew that the show-down would have to come sooner or later, so I thought it might as well be sooner, and I went."

"Well," commented Peck, "you know the old saw, 'It's a wise kid who knows his own dad;' but you must have been surprised."

"Surprised? Dumfounded! You're going to meet the governor soon. He asked me to bring you and Dexter around. And listen: don't get the idea from what I've been in the habit of telling you about him that he isn't a trump. He's the best, the kindliest, the most indulgent and forbearing dad that ever was afflicted by a useless offspring whose chief attribute was his ability to waste time and money—"

"Hold on, old man," objected Peck, "it's fine

of you to say that, but I don't think you're half as black as you paint yourself."

"Thanks for the compliment, but when you meet dad, you'll decide that I've been a sort of excrescence on the face of society and that I should have got wise to myself long ago. I did have some excuse for differing with the old gentleman because of his inflexible prejudices against anybody whose ancestors hadn't dug clams at Plymouth or Provincetown, but aside from that we should have been pals.

"I suppose one of my forebears was a hod-carrier and the blood of that plebeian ancestor predominates in my veins; I'm a sort of throw-back. I never cared a hang who any fellow's ancestor was, the only thing that interested me was the fellow himself. I noticed that the chaps with the high batting averages in college were mostly those who worked their way through."

"I know some of them," laughed Peck, "who are in jail."

"Well," countered Pemberton, "I know

some of the others who ought to be. However, we're dipping into sociology. What I wanted to tell you is that you are expected up for dinner to-morrow evening. Can you make it?"

"To-morrow? Well....hardly," hesitated Peck.

"Lady?" ventured Pemberton, with a grin.

"Why—er—"

"Yes, I see it is. All right, we'll make it next week."

Peck agreed to a day the following week, not a little embarrassed that Pemberton had guessed the truth, but not volunteering any information as to why he could not accept Pemberton's invitation for the following evening, the latter suspected that Peck was contracting an affair of the heart.

Whistling softly to Peck's evident discomfort, Pemberton walked away. He stopped for a moment at the door and said:

"You know, we've been talking a lot recently about extending this business, and

I've an idea that when the governor meets you two fellows, he'll be ready to go along with us to the limit."

"Don't think that I'm not keen to meet him," said Peck earnestly; "I fully appreciate the importance of his acquaintance and good will, but aside from that I feel that to know him is a privilege. And," he added smilingly, "I am anxious for your father to see that you are not hooked up with a couple of Bolsheviki."

"Well, old man, if you mean that, you stay away and let Dexter come."

With that parting shot Pemberton passed through the door before the ready tongue of Peck could frame a response.

CHAPTER XIX

PEMBERTON'S reference to an extension of the business was the result of many discussions between him and his associates in the recent past.

Things were progressing exceedingly well. The rapidity with which re-orders had been coming in indicated that Dexo was going to succeed beyond even the rosiest expectations of its originator.

In fact, the rapid growth of the business had been somewhat of a puzzle to Peck, who had about come to the conclusion that much of the soap must have been sold to people who were buying it for personal use. Certainly there did not seem to be enough dogs afflicted with mange or blessed with humane masters to justify the belief that the entire sale had come from that source exclusively.

One afternoon Peck dropped into a drug store and made a small purchase as an excuse to engage the clerk in conversation. He picked up a package of Dexo from the display on the counter and asked, casually:

"Is there much call for this stuff?"

"Why, yes, considerable."

"You wouldn't suppose that there are enough dogs to warrant the cost of advertising such an article, would you?"

"It isn't used on the dogs," laughed the druggist, "but on the dog-gone fools that own them."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, more people are buying that stuff for hair-restorer than for use on dogs. And," he added, "I suppose it's all right at that."

Further inquiry led Peck to the conclusion that the scanty-haired of both sexes had become victims—or disciples—of his school of advertising, evidently being convinced that what was good for the dog was also good for

its master, and so an avenue of trade was opened in a totally unlooked-for direction.

According to precedent in such circumstances, Peck should have been delighted with his discovery, but in spite of the fortuitous turn of events, he could not help feeling a bit depressed as continued investigation convinced him that he was supplying an entirely different clientele than he had originally intended to reach.

He had started out to market a dog soap, and he found himself selling a hair-restorer! When he looked the situation squarely in the face, he shuddered to think what would have been the result had he depended entirely on the dog market. He thought that he had carefully investigated the possibilities of his field and they had looked exceedingly promising, but the deeper he delved into the matter the more he was convinced that for every cake of Dexo that was bought for a dog, at least ten were purchased for personal use.

It certainly seemed as though he had made

a bad guess, and that ruin would about this time have been unpleasantly imminent had not a curious set of circumstances turned the tide in his direction.

Peck was not much of a believer in luck; he felt that good fortune was rarely the result of accident, but he could not get away from the fact that here was success knocking at his door as the purely accidental result of improving an opportunity toward which his back had been turned and at which his nose would have turned up had some one suggested it.

Well, it was a blow to his pride and a rap at his judgment, but he was not disposed to quarrel with fate when it was particularly kind to him. He consoled himself, however, with the reflection that whatever success might come to him was the result of his having taken a sporting chance and backed it up by industrious, persistent effort; fortune, he told himself, seldom smiled on a coward.

The preparation undoubtedly possessed qualities which rendered it an antiseptic and a

germicide, and after discussing the result of his investigations with Dexter, the latter suggested that he could slightly change the formula so that the soap would exude a delicate perfume instead of the pungent petroleum odor, and that this type, if desired, could be sold under a different label for toilet use.

But Peck quickly vetoed this plan. He argued that the crude-oil odor was probably one of the most convincing arguments in favor of the soap.

"The public has been educated to believe," he said, "that crude-oil is a hair grower. Take away the petroleum odor and you kill your best selling feature."

So nothing was done in the way of changing the formula or the package beyond the addition of some reading matter which explained that Dexo was not only a splendid soap for beasts but an excellent one for man, and as many testimonials had been received relative to its hair-growing properties, some of them were enclosed in the wrapping.

Peck and Dexter were eventually introduced into the Pemberton household, where they were entertained one evening at dinner.

If either of them expected the cold civility which is supposed to be accorded a rank outsider at a social function in a distinguished family, the thought was quickly dispelled. Shortly after they entered the splendid Pemberton home there was a warmth of greeting by the master himself, such as only a well-bred gentleman can extend, that put them both instantly at their ease.

The other members of the family, consisting of Mrs. and Miss Pemberton—Miss Anne Pemberton, to be specific—were equally gracious and cordial, so that by the time dinner was served, Peck in particular, who had never seen so many servants in one room in his life, soon forgot to be annoyed by the attentions of the butler and his assistant, and was able to enjoy his dinner without feeling that some slight inadvertence at table might earn for him the eternal scorn of the dignified pair who

seemed to be eying him continually for the express purpose of spoiling his evening.

Peck had been placed next to Anne. Her charming personality quickly appealed to him; she was a different type from any girl he had met before. There were centuries of refinement reflected in her delicately chiseled features, and her well-modulated voice and perfect enunciation proclaimed her schooling abroad.

Quite naturally, Peck instantly contrasted her with Muriel, the only other wealthy girl he was acquainted with; they were certainly dissimilar and yet each was exceedingly attractive. Up to that moment Peck had thought Muriel the most charming woman he had ever met, but now his judgment was suspended. Between the two goddesses was the difference of Diana and Daphne.

Peck's good looks were not lost on his fair hostess, either. He was attired in a well-fitting dress-suit, a luxury which he had but recently indulged in, and since it was the product of a good tailor, his slender figure

showed to the best advantage. They were a fine looking couple and they seemed to find much of mutual interest to talk about; in fact, before dinner was over, Peck had been invited by Anne to call again, and he had made a definite engagement to do so.

After coffee had been served the men retired to the library, where the elder Pemberton was not slow to bring the conversation around to matters of business. He proved to be an attentive listener as well as an accomplished questioner, and any doubts which either Peck or Dexter may have entertained as to his business acumen, by reason of his great inherited wealth, were quickly dissipated.

He seemed very much delighted that his son had finally got into active commercial life and he was particularly pleased by the fact that the young man was apparently this time sticking to the job. Both Dexter and Peck appeared to meet with his unqualified approval and he warmed up to them so obviously that before the evening was old an *entente cordiale*

had been established which promised big things for the Peck Company.

Dexter related in detail how he had made his great discovery and what he hoped to do with it eventually. Its present application, he explained, was merely incidental, as the possibilities were almost incalculable.

Peck pictured the future of the business provided enough capital could be interested to extend the enterprise into the broad field of household soaps, and he gave Pemberton some facts and figures appertaining to the vast business of Crosby. Theirs, however, was a product which could be made for half the cost of Benzinia, and the attractive thing about it was that Dexter's soap actually combined the virtues which Crosby's product was advertised to have but in reality possessed, if at all, in a very limited degree.

Pemberton was greatly interested, and before his guests had departed he was committed to a promise: if Tommy stuck to his last, as he seemed inclined to do, he would finance

the enterprise in a big way. The amount of money which he stood ready to invest was of less importance to him, he said, than his son's future. He wanted to keep the boy headed in the right direction—to create something for himself, not to live on what others had already created. He was afraid that, possibly, his own life had been ordered too much that way, so he wanted Tommy to be a vital force in the land —a pilot, not a passenger.

And so Peck and Dexter walked homeward that night, each with high hopes in his breast. Peck's dream of leadership in big business seemed destined to materialize; Dexter, happy in the thought that his discovery was to be financed by ample capital, but what was more important and most unusual, he would be in a position to share in the long end of the profits, which was not ordinarily the good fortune of the average scientist or inventor.

The future seemed merely a matter of detail. Peck already had his eye on a plant which Dexter had said was exactly what was

needed for the manufacture of the new product in a large way. The property, now idle, had been a government plant during the war and was for sale. On the morrow they would look into the purchase of the factory with the assurance of sufficient capital to make the deal, if terms could be struck with the officials in charge.

CHAPTER XX

IT IS probably unnecessary to follow, step by step, the rapid development of the Peck Company, after actively invading the wider field of operation in the soap business.

It is sufficient for the purpose of this narrative to state that with the advantages offered by a splendid, modern plant and all the necessary capital for expansion, the company quickly became a factor of importance and Crosby awoke one day to the realization that a formidable competitor was on his trail.

The product which began to compete with Benzinia was called "Peck's Petroleum." The name was chosen for its alliterative and descriptive qualities, and the same methods, but with some variation, that had been used successfully to popularize Dexo, were again employed by

Peck to bring his new product to the attention of the public.

The first advertisements while somewhat veiled, were incidentally informative; they related to crude petroleum, its origin and virtues. They were followed by others which stated that heretofore crude-oil had never been made water-soluble, and therefore could not be substituted as a basis for soap, in place of the vegetable or animal oils then in general use. The next announcement contained the statement that a process had just been discovered for the saponification of crude petroleum and the final advertisement recorded the fact that Peck's Petroleum was the only laundry soap employing the process and therefore the only one that actually combined the qualities of benzine and soap; because the discovery had revolutionized the industry, Peck's Petroleum was offered in a bar twice the size of, but at the same price as, ordinary laundry soap.

Crosby had not been alarmed by Peck's venture into the dog soap field. He had

looked on it tolerantly and had even congratulated him on his success once or twice when they had met at the Crosby home, where Peck was now an occasional visitor to Muriel. Crosby, in fact, had been somewhat flattered that one of his chance remarks had formed the nucleus of a business which promised to blossom into no inconsiderable success.

He did not try to discourage Peck's visits to his daughter. His respect for his ex-advertising manager had increased considerably in the last few months, thus vindicating the proverb that a prophet is not without honor only in his own land. Crosby regretted he had let Peck get away from him, but he had never admitted it to Muriel. The nearest he had come to such admission was to say jestingly to her:

"Of course, he'll succeed; I told you, when you asked my opinion in the beginning, that he had a chance. And, after all"—this with a chuckle—"I gave him the idea."

But the scene had shifted. Peck with his petroleum soap was cutting into Crosby's busi-

ness to an alarming extent. Crosby's agents were deserting to the enemy, who offered them a bigger and a better product which not only sold readily to the consumer, but which was beginning to be widely advertised and to better advantage, and upon which there was a larger margin of profit to all concerned. Here was a combination that was hard to overcome and a condition that was bound to spell ruin for the Crosby concern unless some prompt remedy were found to combat the situation.

Reed had progressed rapidly to a top position in the Benzinia Company. He had been made vice-president and was in practical charge of the business. Crosby had relaxed his personal efforts for the past year and had handed the reins over to his favorite, who by clever cunning had attacked the weak spot in Crosby's armor to his own great advantage.

Wise as he was in the affairs of the world and past-master of merchandising, Crosby was peculiarly susceptible to flattery, and Reed's adroitly administered adulation had won him a

position which his business ability could never have achieved. His victory was made easier because Crosby had become a victim to gout, which compelled him to absent himself from business for long periods at a time.

The day had come, however, when circumstances made it imperative for him to take notice of the outstanding fact that his splendid business was on the toboggan, and unless something definite and immediate were done to revivify it, the Benzinia Company would continue down grade until it struck bottom.

Crosby had been ordered to Mt. Clemens by his physician who had commanded him to remain there or at some similar resort for a stated period; he was told that he would have to do this or his ailment might develop into something difficult if not impossible to cure.

There was nothing left but to follow the doctor's advice, so before arranging for his departure he called Reed into consultation for the purpose of discussing ways and means to rehabilitate the business.

"The thing is serious, Wesley," he said, "and we've got to do something radical to regain our position in the trade. I've been thinking of a number of ways by which we might inject new life into the business, but I am always faced by the fact that we're fundamentally weak. Peck's got a formula which we have got to get. He has us beaten in the matter of cost, and between you and me his soap is the best thing of its kind on the market. There's no use for us to fool ourselves."

"What do you suggest?" asked Reed, who never had an original idea.

"That's what I wanted to ask you," said Crosby, with a trace of irritation; "you've been practically running things for some time and your mind should be more alert than mine. I'm not so keen as I used to be and this damned gout has got on my nerves; I can't seem to concentrate. Think this matter over and let's have a meeting to-morrow, by which time you may have an inspiration. My notion is that we must get Peck's formula. Get your

mind working on how we can do that, unless you can think of something better."

The following day Reed had to admit to Crosby that he had been unable to devise any plan better than the one suggested for the relief of the situation, so he would try to arrange a luncheon date with Peck for the purpose of sounding him on the proposition of securing the rights to the formula.

"Very well," agreed Crosby, "go ahead, but I don't think you'll get much out of that young man in the beginning; still, you may start some basis for negotiation. I can't tell you how to proceed, but you will have to handle the situation diplomatically, because if he suspects how hard put we are, he'll be six miles in the air; I know the whippersnapper."

"You may safely leave the details to me. I'll try to get him on the phone and date him up for this afternoon or to-morrow. I'll report progress as soon as I've talked with him."

Two days later Crosby walked into Reed's office and inquired whether he had seen Peck.

"I had lunch with him yesterday," said Reed, "and I was going to make a report to you this afternoon."

"Well, what happened?"

"Your judgment of men is almost uncanny," began Reed, administering a dose of flattery as a prelude to his confession of failure to accomplish anything: "You were certainly right when you said he would be up in the air."

Crosby smiled appreciatively:

"Up stage, was he?"

"Up! Why he's so high in the air that the altitude record in comparison is merely the roof of hell!"

"I'd say that was pretty high up, Wesley," laughed Crosby, sitting down to hear the details.

"Why, do you know," began Reed in an injured tone, "that he had the effrontery to decline my invitation to lunch at the club and to insist that I meet him half-way up-town before he even agreed to the appointment!"

Reed lit a cigarette to give himself poise and he puffed it once or twice in assumed composure. Then he related to Crosby how Peck had laughed at him with studied insolence and how he had declined to consider any proposition relative to the purchase of the formula or any rights thereto.

"Of course you didn't let him get the idea that we wanted it very badly?" questioned Crosby apprehensively.

"Certainly not. I intimated—barely hinted—that we *might* be interested, and he came back at me with the statement that he knew when I asked him for lunch that I was after something. I laughed that off, but to tell you the truth, I restrained my temper with difficulty. Then he had the nerve to tell me that he knew he had us 'on the run'—"

"He did, did he!" interrupted Crosby almost savagely.

"Oh, that's not all. He went so far as to say that his formula or any part of it wasn't for sale, but if *we*—now get this insolence—

if we cared to consider some proposition he might be prepared to buy us out, at a price!"

"What did you reply to that?" snapped Crosby.

"I saw that there was no use discussing anything with an upstart who was drunk with a little success, so I changed the subject, assured him that I was merely jesting and that the only reason I had asked him to lunch was for a sociable chat. The matter ended there. He sent his regards to you, thanked me for the lunch, half sarcastically, and....well, that's about all that happened."

Crosby sat silently gazing out of the window; his thoughts seemed to be far away.

"I think his association with the Pembertons has gone to his head," ventured Reed, feeling uncomfortable at Crosby's attitude.

"Their dollars are as many as the sands on the beach," said Crosby, arising painfully, "and," he added, "they can give us a run for it if they are so inclined. We've got to get that formula; got to get it, Reed!"

"When are you planning to leave, Mr. Crosby?"

"Next Sunday—that's the trouble; I feel as though I ought to stay on the job and see this thing through."

"How long do you expect to be gone?"

"About two months, I'm afraid, but I'll be where you can reach me by long distance phone if necessary."

"It won't be necessary," said Reed with a confident air. "I'll find a way out if you'll leave it to me."

"I've got to leave it to you, Wesley, but for heaven's sake, *do* something! Get that formula if it can be had at a price, that's my suggestion."

"What do you mean by a price?"

"Seventy-five thousand—yes, a hundred thousand. We've got to have it, that's all."

"Do I understand you to say that I am authorized to negotiate for Peck's formula and to go as high as one hundred thousand dollars for it, if necessary?"

"If necessary, yes. You heard what I said —*get it!*"

"I'll get it. You're leaving Sunday, you said?"

"I think so."

"Is Muriel going with you?"

"No; she wanted to, but this is no joy-ride, and it would be deadly dull for her out there, so I've induced her to stay home."

"Alone?"

"No, her aunt, an old spinster who has never visited New York before, is coming on from the West to remain until I get back. Muriel will have the time of her life showing the old lady the sights."

"I'll keep in touch with them and see that they are not lonely," said Reed assuringly.

"Do," replied Crosby, a smile playing about the corners of his mouth. The idea of Muriel being lonely amused him. Her men friends were so numerous that when he wanted her alone for an evening he had to notify her in advance. He called it "making a reservation."

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN one is unexpectedly asked to luncheon, and the invitation comes from a former business associate whose past attitude has been one of consistent indifference, if not unfriendliness, it is quite natural that such an overture should be looked upon with suspicion. Wherefore, Peck was quick to suspect that Reed's invitation was not altogether a disinterested show of cordiality as the result of a change of heart.

He had, therefore, taken keen delight in making Reed come half-way up-town to a meeting place before he would consent to accept his invitation, and the readiness with which Reed had agreed to the arrangement left little doubt in his mind that his suspicions were correct.

"I'm going to give that gentleman a ride over the jumps," remarked Peck to Pemberton, who was present when Reed had telephoned the invitation.

"What do you suppose he wants?"

"I can't guess, but he wants something, you can bet your shirt on that! What was that line of Virgil, about the gift-bearing Greeks?"

Pemberton wrinkled his brows in thought.

"Let's see....er—'*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*,' wasn't it?"

"I wish I had remembered that; I'd have sprung it on him over the phone."

"Maybe he wouldn't have understood it."

"He should have, he was a lawyer."

"Not all lawyers know Latin," said Pemberton airily.

"You're right; some of them, like necessity, know no law."

"I trust that witticism is as impersonal as it is unoriginal?"

"Certainly; you never were a lawyer."

"Your goal," said Pemberton, saluting.

Peck's conviction, however, that Reed wanted a favor, was not altogether based on pure deduction, as he tried to make Pemberton believe. He had gleaned some information a few nights before, from Muriel, who regarded Peck's success as vindication of her judgment of his ability. In a way she gloried in his achievement and she had in her enthusiasm ingenuously let slip a few remarks from which Peck had gathered that the Benzinia Company was growing apprehensive of its young competitor.

He might have pressed the advantage and picked up more information but for a turn in the conversation which slightly jolted his vanity and took his mind off business.

Muriel had evinced a sudden interest in Pemberton.

"Tell me," she had asked, "is he really as good-looking as his pictures?"

Peck assured her that he was; then she wanted fuller details. She had often seen

his pictures in the illustrated society magazines and in the Sunday supplements of newspapers.

Muriel moved in a fashionable orbit where wealth ruled, but Pemberton's set was an exclusive circle in which family counted for more than money. In his case, however, he possessed the double advantage of both ancestry and fortune. In the ordinary course of events there was as little likelihood of their meeting each other socially as there was in the clashing of the circling spheres. To know Pemberton would have been a distinction, but Muriel was too independent and too well-bred to intimate that she was interested in him beyond a natural curiosity.

Peck, however, was supersensitive where Muriel was concerned; he fancied that her questioning had gone beyond ordinary interest and he felt a bit piqued that he had been temporarily eclipsed by the advertised brilliancy of an invisible star, so in order to prove the indifference he did not feel, he outdid himself in praise of his friend.

"The best thing about him," he said, "is that he is thoroughly unspoiled, perfectly democratic and an all around prince of good fellows. I'm sure you'd like him immensely."

"I'm sure I should," she agreed.

"I'll bring him around sometime," Peck suggested recklessly.

"Oh, will you?" said Muriel in unmistakable delight.

"Certainly," promised Peck, but with the secret determination that he would do nothing of the sort; he had no intention of introducing so dangerous a rival.

He had permitted himself of late to dream of that time in the not too distant future when he should have the Benzinia Company neatly embalmed for final interment in the cemetery of extinct enterprises, while Reed, as chief crêpe-hanger, kept a lonely vigil over the corpse. Then, when Crosby was forced to come to him in his extremity, he would perform the miracle of resurrection by consolidating Benzinia with Peck's Petroleum and save the

old man from ruin. Joyfully he would then enfold the radiant Muriel in his arms and accept the parental blessing with the daughter's love and gratitude.

This fanciful tableau came into his mind now, but it seemed like a scenario for a maudlin motion-picture romance.

Apparently Muriel's interest in him was not wholly without platonic significance. His thoughts flew to another lovely woman with whom he was just getting well acquainted.... Anne Pemberton....he contrasted her pale, aristocratic loveliness with the piquant beauty of Muriel's animated countenance....he didn't know, he told himself, but that he liked the former better....Well, he wouldn't introduce Pemberton, anyhow....not now, at any rate.

But fate ruled otherwise.

A few days later, Pemberton told him that he had tried to reach him the night before by telephone, as he had suddenly acquired two good seats for the Winter Garden.

"I tried all your old haunts," said he, "but I couldn't locate you."

"Sorry; I was at Crosby's."

"Say, what rôle are you playing there? Sherlock Holmes or Romeo?"

Peck smiled mysteriously.

"She's a dandy girl, Tommy—and, by the way, she wanted to know all about you."

"Good lord! You didn't tell her?"

"Not the truth; but I promised to bring you around."

"Not on your life."

"All right," smiled Peck, "it's your loss."

"Well, this has been my lucky year; I can afford to take a loss. Speaking of losses, didn't you say something about buying my roadster?"

"I said I might if the price were low and the terms were long."

"You'll take it as a gift?"

"I will not."

"You wouldn't refuse a Christmas present, would you?"

"This isn't Christmas."

"Well, Christmas is coming and I fully intended to give it to you then."

Pemberton persisted in his generous intention to give the car to Peck and as he would listen to no other arrangement he had his way. He had just received a new machine, the delivery of which had been unexpectedly advanced.

"It's a wonder," he told Peck, "and I want to give you a demonstration this afternoon. She'll do ninety."

"Not with me," said Peck decisively.

"Well," laughed Pemberton, "I'll hold her down to eighty-five, but I want you to have a look at the trimmest boat in town."

And so that afternoon, as Pemberton sat at the wheel of his splendid car, with Peck at his side, they drew up on Fifth Avenue at the Eighty-sixth Street entrance to the Park, just as the officer had halted traffic north and south.

As they waited for the signal to proceed, a young lady of exceptional beauty passed down the east side of the Avenue and smilingly bowed to them.

Peck returned the salute with gusto.

Pemberton stared at the vision and gasped.

"Say!" he exclaimed, nudging Peck with his elbow, "who's the little queen?"

"You said this morning that you didn't want to know her."

"Not—Crosby?"

Peck nodded affirmatively.

"Go on," he said, "traffic's moving."

"I'm retracting that statement right now," said Pemberton, stepping on the accelerator and cutting around the corner toward Madison Avenue.

"Where are you going?" asked Peck, suspecting what Pemberton was about to do.

"Around the block; I'll catch her by the time she gets to the next corner."

"Wait a minute, you idiot," protested Peck, "you can't do a thing like that."

"I know I can't."

By this time Pemberton had violated all the speed and traffic ordinances, circumnavigated the block and emerged into Fifth Avenue again, just as Muriel had crossed the street.

Without a moment's hesitation he brought his car to a sudden stop directly opposite her, applying the emergency brake with a sharp click of the ratchet.

Muriel stood still and stared at them in astonishment.

Peck jumped out of the car, hat in hand; he had been thinking rapidly how he should meet the embarrassing situation. Pemberton was by his side.

"Tried to stop down the Avenue," lied Peck, "but we had to move on with the traffic. Miss Crosby, let me present my friend Mr. Pemberton."

Pemberton bowed and acknowledged the introduction formally.

"Don't you believe him, Miss Crosby," he laughed, "I insisted on meeting you right now and I drove around the block over his protest."

For some ten minutes they stood chatting at the curb. That is, Pemberton and Muriel talked. The easy, suave, ready-witted Pemberton, with the apt facility of one used to the

society of women, had rendered Peck silent and he was glad to say good-by.

"I'm going with you the next time you call, old man," declared Pemberton as they drove away, "and make it soon."

CHAPTER XXII

THERE was no denying that Pemberton was hard hit.

After much urging he had finally persuaded the reluctant Peck to take him to Crosby's.

"I believe you're afraid of me," said he to Peck banteringly, when for a week he had been unable to get his friend to fix on an evening.

"Of course I am," Peck admitted laughingly; sometimes the best way to hide the truth is to tell it. Finally, however, a day was named and the visit was made.

Pemberton became a regular caller after that. Crosby was still away, and while Muriel was busy with her usual coterie of friends, not to mention her maiden aunt, she still managed always to have an evening open for Pemberton.

He found her a refreshing diversion at first, but as their acquaintance ripened into friendship, his interest in her rapidly began to assume a different form.

As he felt himself yielding to the tender mood, he was worried over one thing: since he had become friendly with Muriel, Peck's visits to her had ceased. Whether the latter was sacrificing himself on the altar of friendship, or if he had found solace in another direction, Pemberton was unable to discover. Peck's visits had terminated so suddenly that Muriel had asked several times what had become of him.

There was nothing particularly self-denying in Pemberton's nature, but he was genuinely fond of Peck, and he was afraid that he might soon find himself in the difficult position of having to choose between love and friendship, and he was not sure, if things came to that pass, where his decision should lie. He was already devoted to Peck, but he felt also that he was beginning to adore Muriel.

Whether that young lady reciprocated his affection was an open question, as she was wise enough to keep him guessing, and that, of course, only added to her charm.

Affairs at the Benzinia Company had not improved. Reed had been unable to accomplish anything tangible in the way of following Crosby's instructions toward securing the formula. He found himself, in fact, surrounded by apparently insuperable barriers.

The only consolation—if that were a consolation—was to be found in Crosby's absence. His cure was taking longer than anticipated and his return to business was indefinitely deferred. Reed was in doubt which way to turn. Peck's attitude toward him made another direct overture seem futile and there appeared no other way in which to approach the matter of negotiating for the formula.

Reed had called as usual upon Muriel, but he seldom found her alone. He had always been annoyed by Peck's presence at her home,

and the knowledge that she liked the latter and openly admitted it, only added to his irritation; but he had never regarded him as a serious rival.

When Reed suggested to Muriel that Peck had not only become a great obstacle in the path of the Benzinia Company, but an avowed and dangerous competitor, and that in the circumstances his presence at her father's home was incongruous and her tolerance of him little less than treasonable, she had merely laughed and said:

"That makes him all the more interesting."

But since Pemberton had injected himself into the situation, complications had multiplied. Reed found himself charged with the difficult task of stopping two competitors who were *persona grata* at the very house of him on whose ruin they were bent, and where he was forced to sit by and helplessly watch the play.

Pemberton, he had to admit, was not to be lightly taken. If that attractive young gentle-

man had matrimonial intentions toward Muriel, the chances were that he would be successful; no young woman could reasonably be expected to pass up so excellent a catch. If this were to happen, Reed felt that his chances were dashed both socially and commercially. If, on the other hand, he could effect no understanding with Peck and Pemberton before Crosby's return, his future was equally dark.

Pemberton had treated him with rather cold civility on the one occasion when they had met at Crosby's, his attitude being the result of a preconceived prejudice formed by what Peck had told him of his former associate. Reed knew this instinctively and he felt that the outlook was not encouraging. Still, something had to be done—but what?

He was pondering his problem one morning in his office when a member of his sales force stood at the open door and knocked gently.

"May I see you?" the salesman asked respectfully.

"Hello, Myers," said Reed, starting from his reverie, "come in."

"I stumbled on a funny proposition," began Myers, "thought you'd be interested."

"What is it?" asked Reed indifferently, motioning him to a chair.

"Up in New Haven, yesterday, I ran across a fellow by the name of Peck—and he's in the soap business, too."

"What's funny about that? Peck's a common name; the directory's full of them."

"I know, but this guy's putting out a product that he calls 'Peck's Petrol Soap.'"

"That's not our funeral," said Reed with some irritation. "Let Mr. Junius Peck and his gang worry about that."

"Wait a minute, here's the funny part," persisted Myers, "this New Haven guy maintains that his trade-mark has been in use for three years, and he says that he's going to bring suit against our old friend Peck for infringement. He tells me that his lawyer claims he has a good case and that the New

York outfit will have to settle with him or he'll stop 'em from using the brand they're advertising."

Reed's attitude changed instantly. His eyes fairly sparkled with appreciation of the possibilities the situation presented. The importance of this bit of news struck him so forcibly that he could scarcely retain his composure.

If Myers spoke the truth, and he had no occasion to doubt him, here was a way out. If he could forestall the New Haven man's notification to Peck so that he could buy the trade-mark, he could soon bring his competitor down to earth and make him amenable to reason.

"This fellow," continued Myers, "says that he has figured out that the Peck Company of New York has spent fully a million dollars in advertising a brand to which they have no rights, and that he intends to make them settle with him or stop using the name; of course, he's wise enough to know they can't afford to stop now."

"Has he communicated with them in any way?" asked Reed anxiously.

"I don't think they're wise. He told me that he was going to let them shoot a little more advertising before he jumped them."

"Give me the firm name and address—here," pushing forward a pad, "write it down."

"Here's their card," said Myers.

Reed scanned it closely and then lapsed into thought for a moment.

"What sort of an outfit is it?"

"Oh, a little two-by-four plant. I don't think stock and machinery, such as they have, is worth $2,500."

"Myers," began Reed, solemnly emphasizing his words, "you know that this Peck and Pemberton crowd have made a lot of trouble for us."

"Don't I know it! They've made my job pretty tough."

"All right; now this information you have given me is of considerable importance and it may help me work out a plan to lay them

away. Can I depend on you to keep what you've told me strictly confidential?"

"Sure. It's absolutely graveyard."

"Don't breathe a word to a soul. If Pemberton or Peck should get wind of it, the beans are spilled. Just forget the whole conversation until you hear from me."

"I'll not open my trap until you say the word."

"Good. I may need your assistance, and if I do, I'll call on you; but whether I do or not, you won't regret it, if I can put through what I have in mind."

"Thanks. You can rest easy as far as I'm concerned. I'm deaf and dumb until you call me back to life."

"Fine! Have a cigar," said Reed, handing him the box to select from.

After Myers had gone, Reed's first impulse was to call up New Haven on the telephone. Then he concluded that to do so was to invest the matter with too much importance. The better way was to write for an interview in

the offices of the Benzinia Company, where the small-town man was sure to be impressed. He must work fast, however. If he should be successful in acquiring the rights to Peck's brand he would be in a position to trade with his competitor on an entirely different basis. He would force Peck to name a reasonable price for his formula at the threat of losing his trade-mark, attached to which was the good will of probably a million dollars' worth of advertising.

Crosby had told him to spend $100,000 if necessary to get the formula. A moment ago the prospects of acquiring it seemed hopeless, even at that price, but now he saw a ray of light. If he proceeded discreetly he could probably buy out the unrated New Haven man for a few thousand dollars and still have left a wide margin of his $100,000 with which to trade with Peck.

The ethics of the proceeding did not appeal to him, but desperate situations require heroic measures and he was prepared to apply

them. This was not the time to quibble over the means to a necessary end. Results were what he was after and Crosby's last words were, "Get that formula."

Reed rang for his secretary.

"Take this letter," he commanded, when the young lady had arrived:

"Mr. Henry C. Peck, President, The Peck Company, New Haven, Connecticut. Dear Sir: Our Mr. Myers informs us that you are the manufacturer of Peck's Petrol Soap, and that you have been making and selling that brand for some three years. If this information is correct we should be interested in talking with you. Could you arrange to come to New York at our expense, for a discussion with the undersigned? A prompt reply would be appreciated."

Reed sat back in his chair and reflected.

"Is that all?" asked his secretary.

"Add this postscript: We suggest that you keep this communication confidential."

Reed had the letter read back to him from

the stenographer's notes and feeling that it had the right ring—interest without urgency—he directed his secretary to write it immediately.

"You may sign my name for me," he said, "and mail it at once; I can't wait to sign it as I'm late for an engagement now."

The young lady promised prompt compliance and proceeded to type the letter. By the time it was finished and she had signed Reed's name to it, one of her fellow-stenographers stopped at her desk for a sociable chat. They conversed for a few minutes and then Reed's secretary recalled her instructions.

"Wait a moment, Ethel," she said, inserting an envelope in the machine, "I've got to get this letter off immediately."

Then as she resumed the interrupted conversation, she rang for an office boy. Without noticing that, instead of typing "New Haven" she had perfunctorily written "New York" in the address on the envelope, she directed the messenger to enclose the letter and take it at once to the post-office.

CHAPTER XXIII

PECK, arriving at his office the following morning sooner than his usual hour, walked into the stenographic department, where he found Miss Stuart, who was charged with opening and distributing the mail, pondering over a letter.

"Here's a curious thing," she said, "this envelope is addressed to Henry C. Peck, care the Peck Company, New York City, but the letter is evidently intended for a person of the same name in New Haven. The queer thing about it is that it's signed by Mr. Reed."

Peck took the letter and read it.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he exclaimed.

"Is it for us?" asked the mystified Miss Stuart.

"No, but it's a lucky thing we got it. Let me have the envelope."

Peck went hurriedly into his office and left word that Pemberton and Dexter were to see him just as soon as they arrived.

Half an hour later all three were in conference over the proper means of procedure to outwit the enemy whose plans had been accidentally exposed.

In the midst of the discussion Miss Stuart came in with the rest of the morning's mail.

"Here's a letter about another Peck," she smiled. "This one's from Chicago; it's getting to be epidemic."

"One more peck," remarked Pemberton, lighting a cigarette, "and we'll have a bushel of trouble."

Junius took the letter from Miss Stuart and as he read it his face became wreathed in smiles. He jumped up, waved it aloft and executed a war dance in the middle of the floor.

Pemberton and Dexter looked on in astonishment.

"Fellows," said Peck hilariously, "come and kiss me. This is the medicine! Here's a let-

ter from the Middle West Packing Company of Chicago, that'll warm the cockles of your hearts; I'll read it aloud—get this:

"'The Peck Company, New York City. Gentlemen: You are the manufacturers of Peck's Petroleum, which we understand has been widely advertised in the East, but which has only recently invaded this territory. You are probably unaware of the fact that H. & C. Peck, Incorporated, one of our subsidiaries, have been making a line of soaps and cleansers, which have been marketed in this vicinity since 1905, under the trade name of "Peck's Petroleum Products."

"'The name was never registered, which probably accounts for the fact that you did not know of it; however, the soap in particular has been a limited but steady seller for many years.

"'Our product, of course, in no way approaches your own excellent article, and we do not for a moment mean to infer that we could compete with it, but the fact remains that the

brand you are using is the property, by right of long prior use, of H. & C. Peck.

"'It is neither our intention nor desire in any way to hold you up. The object of this letter is primarily to inform you of the circumstances in the belief that probably you would be glad to make some arrangements with us for acquiring the brand which is of great importance to you but of less value to us.

"'We believe that Mr. Horace Pemberton is interested in your company and as he is also one of our oldest stock-holders you will understand that we are prompted largely by a spirit of friendship in calling this matter to your attention.

"'We should be glad to hear from you at your convenience.'"

When Peck finished reading the letter, there was a round of hand-shaking.

"I wonder," said Pemberton, "if the governor is really a stock-holder in that concern?"

"Call him on the phone, Tommy, and find out."

"I'll do it," agreed Pemberton, going into his own room.

"Apparently," said Dexter, "this fellow Peck in New Haven, that Reed got a line on, is using a name to which he has no right, either. When did they say H. & C. Peck were established?"

"Fifteen years ago—in 1905."

Pemberton came triumphantly back into the office.

"That's right," he exclaimed, "I've just talked with the governor. He says that he's been a stock-holder for years and that the president of the Middle West Packing Company is an old friend. I told him that I may have to see them so he's preparing a letter of introduction for me."

"Tommy," said Peck, slapping him on the back, "you're an ace! Now here's a scheme to block Mr. Reed:

"You beat it for Chicago, this afternoon; you've got time to catch the Century, which will put you there to-morrow morning. See

your father first, and get that letter so you'll be properly armed. Then if things are as easy as they seem, you ought to have everything fixed up by the afternoon. If you do, get me on long distance here in the office, and just as soon as I know we've landed the brand, I'll mail Reed's letter to old man Peck of New Haven."

"Wait a minute," said Pemberton, "not so fast. What am I to pay for the brand?"

"We'll leave that to you, eh, Dexter?"

Dexter nodded assent.

"Suppose they ask five thousand?"

"Pay it—but I don't think it will be anything like that amount. Those fellows are big and very friendly—they say so in their letter."

"You say that as soon as you know that I've bought the brand you want to mail that letter to New Haven; what's the idea?"

"I mean to do more than that," said Peck. "Listen:

"I'm going to frame up something on Reed that will make that job he tried to pull on us

look like a kindergarten exercise. When you give me the word, I'll erase the New York address from the envelope and have 'New Haven' typed in so neatly that the fellow who gets it will never know it went astray. I'll then put a fresh two-cent stamp on it and drop it in the box. Luckily the envelope was half-open when it arrived, so that it wasn't even cut. Miss Stuart hesitated to open it, she told me, but the fact that it was practically unsealed overcame her qualms, Lord bless her!"

"Well, and then what?" queried Pemberton.

"And then, I'll take the morning train for New Haven and hunt up my esteemed namesake. I'll hand him a story of how I just happened to be passing, and seeing that his name and business were similar to mine, I merely dropped in out of curiosity. Reed wrote him to keep his letter confidential, but he won't. He'll let me in on the ground floor and then I'll turn pale with fright. We'll talk price, I'll ask for time to consult with my asso-

ciates and, if it goes that far, I'll invite him to meet us in New York. Of course, he'll come because Reed has promised to pay his expenses. Then when he gets here, he'll try to work us against Reed. We'll let him play that game until we think that the price is high enough, and then we'll step from under and let Mr. Reed have the gold brick. How's that?"

"Junius," said Pemberton admiringly, "you're not only an ace, but the king, queen, jack and ten-spot—shake!"

Dexter, grinning in silent appreciation, nodded approval, lit his pipe and walked back toward his department.

"I want to be here," he said, "when Reed calls to sell us the trade-mark."

"Good-by, fellows," said Pemberton, "I'm off for the tall grass."

CHAPTER XXIV

ABOUT four o'clock the next afternoon, as Peck and Dexter were discussing the possibility of Pemberton's having failed in his mission, since no word had come from him, the telephone on Peck's desk rang. He picked up the receiver eagerly. The operator announced that Chicago was calling, and in a moment Pemberton was on the wire.

"Hello! That you, Junius?"

"Yes, Peck speaking, Tommy, what's the verdict?"

"Favorable. It was dead easy; I've just had lunch with them. I'm calling now from the Athletic Club. Just signed a preliminary agreement to bind the transaction till the papers can be sent to New York for execution in the usual form. Got the document in my

"I'll apply to the courts for permission to change my name"

pocket and I'm going to make the five-thirty for New York.'"

"Great! Congratulations! Dexter's right here at my elbow; says you're the boy wonder. That goes double."

"Nothing wonderful," laughed Pemberton, "to take something that's handed to you on a silver salver."

"Easy as that, eh? How much?"

"Fifteen hundred. That includes trade-mark, formula, labels, boxes, a little stock—you know, the whole outfit. Could have bought it for less, but was ashamed to dicker. Cordial, nice people and anxious to oblige dad; the president of the concern and he were class-mates. The trade-mark is clean as a whistle; been in continual use for fifteen years. They're going out of the soap business and just about charged us for stuff on hand. See you to-morrow."

"Good—hello—hello!"

Hello!"

'I'm mailing that letter to-night and I'll take

an early train for New Haven in the morning —I want to get there about an hour after the letter, but I'll be back in the afternoon."

"Well, my train may be late; suppose you and Dexter meet me at the club at seven—I ought to be in by that time—we'll dine together and then I'll give you the details and you can report on New Haven."

"That's a date: seven to-morrow evening at the club. Good-by."

"Good-by."

Peck related to Dexter how easily Pemberton had negotiated the trade-mark and at what a surprisingly small price he had bought it. They congratulated themselves on their good fortune in getting out of what the day before had looked like a deep hole, and then Peck proceeded to carry out his plan to get even with Reed.

He made the changes on the envelope as he had outlined them, carefully erased the post-office cancellations, put on a new stamp and dropped Reed's letter in the mail, looking as

innocent as though it had just left the hands of its original sender.

"I wouldn't do this sort of thing, ordinarily," Peck said apologetically, "but that rat needs a lesson; I want him to think he's bought our brand and when he finds out the truth, square himself with Crosby."

"It was a rotten piece of business," agreed Dexter. "Do you suppose that Crosby would have approved such tactics, granting that they could be successful?"

"No, I don't. The old man is a hard trader, but I've never known him to resort to sharp practise. I don't believe he would have stooped to a thing like this."

"You'll be in New Haven to-morrow?"

"Yes, but I should be back in town sometime in the afternoon; however, we'll meet at the club at seven and I hope to have a funny story to tell you and Tommy."

Pemberton's train rolled in on time the following day and he came directly to the club

where he found Peck and Dexter awaiting him. Peck had found out that the train was not late, so he had ordered a good dinner to celebrate the occasion, and the three of them were in the proper mood to enjoy it.

Pemberton's story was just as he had outlined it over the telephone, but he added some interesting details to the effect that the deal was one where friendship for his father had given the transaction the flavor of a social function. Of course, the brand was not of much value to the Middle West people, as they were going out of the soap business, anyhow, but had the proposition been one of cold business, they were in a pretty position to force a price for the brand which the Peck Company would have had to meet as a means of self-protection.

"And now," said Pemberton, "I've told my little story, tell us, J. P., what happened between you and old man Peck of New Haven?"

"Well," began Peck, "I got there about ten o'clock and I arrived at the junk shop he calls

a factory a few minutes later. I suspect that I arrived just after he had finished reading Reed's letter, which probably formed an important part of his morning's mail—judging from the size of his 'plant.' It's a ragtag joint about fifty by a hundred, one-story, greasy, foul-smelling and located along the railroad tracks.

"If I meet any more Pecks that resemble him, I'll apply to the courts for permission to change my name. He has the face of a fox and I guess he's just about as foolish; he hadn't been shaved in two or three days, which didn't add to his beauty. He held out his paw when I introduced myself and I thought I had grasped the tail of a fish.

"The stuff he makes is sold largely to garages. I think he's an ex-chauffeur—Englishman—speaks with a cockney accent, though he's been in this country for some time. He's been selling his brand of refined axle-grease about three years, and I suppose he really thinks he has a clear title to it. He's got some

cheap lawyer to advise him, and he fully expects to shake us down for a big enough bundle to retire on.

"Well, I sprang that story about my having accidentally passed by and so on. He had no reason to suspect that I wasn't telling the truth, but the fact that he had just got that letter from Reed mystified him. I could see that by the way he shuffled about uneasily. Reed's letter was on his desk and he kept looking at it constantly during our conversation.

"I asked him if he had ever heard of our goods.

" ' 'Eard of 'em?' he said in an injured tone, and he pushed at me a bar of his grease-remover branded 'Peck's Petrol Soap.'

"I registered great astonishment at the name.

" 'Why,' I said, 'that's practically the same brand that we're using.'

" 'The sime, is it? you're jolly well right it's the sime! 'Ad n't you stringely dropped in 'ere, as it 'appens, this morning, you'd 'eard

from me attorney to-morrow. Nice kettle o' fish, says I; 'ere I've been making and selling me soap for three years, and your houtfit comes along an' 'ooks me brand!'

"Of course, I expressed great surprise and I let that grow into concern. I permitted him to convince me that he had the goods on us and I finally brought the conversation around to the question of price. What would he take for the brand? He hadn't thought about that; he had a fine growing business and he didn't want to sell out—of course, every man had his price, and if I cared to make a worth-while offer, naturally—you know, the usual balloon juice.

"Well, I asked him what was an approximate price, as he must have some idea, not for the business but for the brand. Oh, he wouldn't sell the brand without the business. Finally we got down to cases and he said that he might consider $25,000 for the trade-mark."

Dexter and Pemberton laughed heartily and when their mirth had subsided, Peck continued:

"He intimated that he had another party on the string who was very anxious to buy his business; I smiled and told him that was an old gag. Then he got sore and almost showed me Reed's letter. I told him that I should have to take up the matter with my associates and that if he would call at our office to-morrow, we'd be glad to talk business with him.

"Before I left, I cautioned him to can that chatter about somebody else wanting his business.

" 'That brand,' said I, 'isn't worth a cent to anybody but us.'

"Well, fellows, at that he almost choked. In another moment he would have rubbed Reed's letter under my nose; but I wanted to avoid that.

"Anyhow, he's going to see us to-morrow at eleven-thirty in the morning. He fixed the time, so of course, he'll have seen Reed first. You understand that I wanted him to be able to say to Reed that he had not shown us his letter. Reed's whole play is to take us by sur-

prise and I don't want anything to interfere with his plans. We've got to beat him at his own game—poison him with his own dose."

"Do you think that Reed has the power to act in Crosby's absence?" asked Dexter.

"That's what I was wondering," said Pemberton.

"I understand," replied Peck with apparent confidence, "that he's absolutely boss when the old man's away, and that he can do just about as he pleases."

"How do you account," asked Dexter wonderingly, "for a man of Crosby's ability and brains—and I assume he has both—putting his business in the hands of a fellow like that?"

"'Tis an old maxim in the schools,'" quoted Peck, "'that flattery's the food of fools; yet now and then you men of wit will condescend to take a bit.'"

"And I suppose," observed Pemberton, "that Reed's some sweet singer?"

"The Sirens had nothing on him," laughed Peck.

It was late in the evening when the three conspirators had completed their plans for the proper reception of the distinguished Mr. Peck of New Haven, and midnight had struck before they tired of pleasantly speculating on the probable fate of the unsuspecting Reed if he should walk into the trap that was being so carefully baited for him.

CHAPTER XXV

THE gentleman from New Haven was prompt. It was exactly eleven-thirty when he was announced.

"Show him up," said Peck to the boy who had brought in his soiled card. "Ask Mr. Pemberton and Mr. Dexter to come to my office first."

In anticipation of a profitable business trip, Mr. H. C. Peck had bought a shave and some store clothes. His trousers were a trifle too long, his sleeves a bit too short and a wisp of hair in the vicinity of his Adam's apple protruded from behind a collar which was a size too big for his neck.

As he entered the room, Peck, Pemberton and Dexter arose ceremoniously to greet him.

"This is my namesake and our competitor,"

said Junius, with a genial smile, introducing his associates to him by name, respectively.

The four of them found chairs and Junius produced a box of cigars from his desk drawer.

"Have a smoke, Mr. Peck."

"Thanks, I don't mind."

Junius passed the box around, but Dexter declined, preferring his pipe. Pemberton, probably suspecting the brand, waved a refusal also and drew a cigar from his pocket. To reassure the visitor Junius helped himself from the box, struck a match and politely offered it first to his namesake.

"Well, gentlemen, I'm 'ere to talk business," began Peck, energetically chewing his cigar.

"So are we," said Junius; "I've told these gentlemen about your proposition and we're inclined to come to some agreement with you, but the price you indicated is altogether out of reason—unless, of course, you've changed your ideas?"

"That being your hattitude," said Peck,

arising, "I guess there's not much use wastin' time."

It was evident that he had talked with Reed, and whatever the conversation, it had stiffened him to the point of independence.

"Wait a moment," said Junius, laying a restraining hand on him, "don't be in such a hurry, we can talk matters over, anyway."

Peck sat down.

"I 'aven't anything to talk about. It's hup to you gents; I told you what I wanted, yesterday."

"You said that the approximate price was $25,000," said Junius soothingly; "certainly you don't mean to stand on that?"

"I told you that yesterday, but 'ad I known what I know now, the price would 'ave been 'igher. I'm stickin' to that because I passed me word, and I'm not in the 'abit of going back on what I sye."

"What do you mean by knowing what you know now?" asked Pemberton.

"I told your pardner that I 'ad another party

wanting me business and 'e was inclined to larf at me. Well, I wasn't chuckin' a bluff. I've come from seein' 'im, and I can sell this arfternoon for $20,000."

"Have you told the party that you were coming to see us?" asked Junius, showing apparent concern.

"That's neyther 'ere nor there," parried Peck, with the obvious intention of letting them know that he had.

"Look here, Mr. Peck," said Junius after fencing back and forth to give the color of sincerity to the negotiations, "we'd like to buy your brand, but your business isn't worth anything like the price you ask, especially since we don't want your plant or stock, but merely your good will and trade-mark. Now, we'll give you $20,000 and close the transaction this morning—take it or leave it."

Peck lit the stump of his cigar, which in his excitement he had been unable to keep going.

"I won't close now. I'll give you gentlemen till three o'clock this arfternoon to think

it over. I'll call you on the phone at that time. If you want to talk to me, good. If not...."

He got up to indicate that he had nothing more to discuss.

"Won't you stay and lunch with us?" asked Pemberton politely, feeling assured that he would not.

"Thank you, but I 'ave an appointment," said Peck with the important air of one who has no time for small amenities when important business beckons; "three this arfternoon, gents; good-dye."

"Well," said Pemberton, "I guess our friend Reed swallowed it, hook, bait and sinker."

"To say nothing of the rod," added Peck. "He's going back now to interview friend Reed and report what happened. He'll probably call us on the phone from his office; that's the play, I'll bet."

"Reed will probably 'listen in' on the wire," suggested Pemberton, "to make sure that

'Enery really 'as an offer from us, and that the lad isn't spoofing 'im as to price—what?"

"You've got it," agreed Peck. "Well, we can tell that by the way he talks. If he tries to get us to confirm the offer over the phone it's reasonably sure that the other fox has his ear to the wire."

"If he has," said Pemberton, "he'll get an ear full."

At three o'clock the gentleman from New Haven was in the Benzinia Company's offices; he had been there for an hour trying to convince Reed that he had not used his letter to get the $20,000 offer from Peck, who he swore had come to see him unsolicited the day before in New Haven.

Reed was skeptical; coincidences were common, but this one was altogether too remarkable. He had hoped to keep the matter secret and to be able to buy the brand for a few thousand dollars; he did not anticipate having to bid for it. Still, he felt that he had to have

it, high or low, but he hated to be held up. In the early morning he had offered Peck $12,500, half of what he had asked, and the offer had been stiffly declined. Peck had promised to return at two o'clock, but he had not told Reed whom he intended to interview in the meantime.

Peck looked at his watch.

"I 'ave to call 'em on the phone. I told 'em I would at three; it's that time now."

"Look here," said Reed, "you can call them from this office, and I'll cut in on the wire; if you can convince me that what you say is the truth, I'll talk to you."

"Good enough," agreed Peck.

Reed picked up the telephone on his desk and told the switchboard operator to get the Peck Company and to ask for Mr. Junius Peck. She was not to say who was calling, but if they insisted on knowing before they would switch Mr. Peck on, she was to say "Mr. H. C. Peck of New Haven."

Then he went outside and arranged for a

connection in another office so that he could listen to the conversation. He told Peck exactly what he intended to do and that gentleman was satisfied. He was prepared to vindicate his honor.

There was no difficulty in getting Junius Peck on the wire.

"That you Mr. Peck?" asked the man from New Haven.

"Yes."

"This is Peck of New 'Aven."

"Ah, yes, Mr. Peck, I've been expecting your call."

"When you dropped into me plice yesterday, I told you me price was $25,000, didn't I?"

"Yes."

"I told you then, and again this morning that I 'ad another party arfter the business, didn't I?"

"Yes, but why is it necessary to go all over that now?"

"Because you doubted me word. Now listen: this is me last call, are you willin' to pay me price?"

"What price?"

"Twenty-five thousand."

"We've talked the matter over and while we want to do business with you, we can't pay that sum—it's too much for what you have to offer."

"What I 'ave to offer is what you jolly well 'ave to 'ave, Mr. Peck; it's a matter o' supply an' demand."

"Twenty thousand dollars, old man, is the best we can do."

"All right, if that's your ultimahtum, I guess the other fellow gets it. Good dye, Mr.—"

"Wait a moment—hello—hello!"

"Well?"

"Come around to see us—maybe we can split the difference."

"What d'ye call splittin' the difference?"

"Can't we talk this matter over personally?

I don't like to transact important business over the phone."

"I 'ave n't got time to come 'round, and besides, there's nobody listenin'; what d'ye mean by splittin' the difference?"

"Well, maybe we could raise it a thousand."

"Good dye," said the gentleman from New Haven, hanging up the receiver.

"Well," said he triumphantly to Reed, when the latter had joined him, "are you satisfied that I wasn't 'anding you any bunk—did I convince you that I didn't tip off me 'and about your letter?"

Reed said that he was satisfied, but that he didn't propose to buy the brand at auction.

"Those fellows offered you $21,000," he said. "I'll give you $23,000, but you'll take the offer now or I'm through."

Peck thought the matter over for a few moments and came to the conclusion that if he didn't act promptly, the two bidders might get together and he would fall between two stools. He had heard of such things before,

so caution got the better of cupidity and he accepted Reed's offer, protesting that he was giving the business away and that he knew he could have got the price he had asked from the Peck Company.

Reed drew up an agreement and had Peck sign it on the spot. Then he gave him a check for a substantial sum on account. He bound him to secrecy regarding the transaction and made him promise that he would not talk with any emissary from the Peck Company, in any circumstances, should one come to New Haven to see him.

At the offices of the Peck Company, three young men, who had had their ears to the telephone for several minutes, were shaking hands and laughing and otherwise disporting themselves in a manner ill befitting the dignity of the executive officers of a large corporation.

CHAPTER XXVI

PECK'S PETROLEUM was making tremendous gains every day, and it was doing so largely at the expense of Benzinia.

The latter company could never meet this competition unless it could produce a soap as good as Peck's and as low priced, and this seemed impossible without the formula which Dexter had never revealed to any one except his two associates. The process was so jealously guarded that not even the plant superintendent was permitted to be present in Dexter's laboratory when he prepared his compound.

It was perfectly obvious, therefore, to Reed's competitors, that the only reason for his trying to get control of the Peck trade-mark was to hold it over them as a club when he again

approached them for the purchase of the formula, something they felt certain he was sure to do.

And so, when a week had passed and no intimation had come from Reed that he intended to use his weapon, Peck and his associates began to speculate on the possibility of his having at the last moment become suspicious and evaded the trap that had been so carefully baited to ensnare him.

The fact, however, that the man from New Haven had not returned to accept their offer led them to believe that Reed must certainly have come to an agreement with him, otherwise Peck would surely have come back.

Peck and Pemberton were discussing the situation one morning when the telephone rang.

"Mr. Job Crosby calling," announced the switchboard operator.

"Crosby!" said Peck in a stage whisper. "It's come at last."

"The boss, himself, eh?" grinned Pemberton.

It developed, however, that it was Crosby's secretary on the telephone; she wanted to know whether Mr. Peck and Mr. Pemberton would see Mr. Crosby if he came up within the hour.

They would be delighted to see him.

"I had no idea," said Peck, "that Crosby was back."

"Nor I. I saw Muriel a few nights ago," remarked Pemberton, assuming an indifferent tone, "and she told me her father was better, but she said nothing about his coming home."

Peck evinced no interest in Pemberton's report of his movements. He had completely dropped out of Muriel's circle since Pemberton had added himself to her list of admirers, and whenever her name had been mentioned by the latter, Peck had replied in monosyllables or not at all; so Muriel as a topic of conversation had become in a measure taboo.

"Do you suppose," asked Pemberton, who had never met Crosby, "that the old boy is coming here to put the screws to us, personally?"

"Darned if I know. He's the last person I expected. If he thought he had the goods on us and wanted to put the skids under us, he'd make us come to see him. That's what's puzzling me. He's an autocrat in matters of that sort; it's always been his policy to trade, whenever he can, in his own bailiwick. It was his doctrine that a man in that position always has the advantage over the other fellow."

"What sort of man, generally speaking, is he?" asked Pemberton, with more than ordinary interest.

"Well," replied Peck reminiscently, "I always liked him until he let himself be influenced by Reed; I began to lose confidence in him when he fell for that bonehead. But he has an agreeable personality; he's straightforward, magnetic and capable generally. You'd like him. He's a good, convincing talker and a good dresser. Looks like a stage banker, or, possibly, a refined edition of one of Opper's caricatures of the Money Trust."

"I wouldn't call that a very vivid picture,"

laughed Pemberton. "I don't know whether you have damned him with faint praise or praised him damnably."

"Oh, well," smiled Peck, "I don't want to bias your opinion. He'll be here in a little while and you may judge for yourself. However," he added after a moment's reflection, "if Crosby's coming around here to rough-house it, I hope he brings Reed along; I'd enjoy making a monkey of that work of art in the presence of his boss."

When Crosby was announced, Peck went forward into the anteroom to meet him. He came alone, and it was evident from his cordial manner that, whatever his mission, his mood was pleasant.

Peck introduced Crosby to Pemberton and Dexter after ushering him into an inner chamber which was used for a board-room.

Pemberton acknowledged the introduction with a flattering reference to Muriel. Crosby's face glowed with pleasure; he was not, of course, unappreciative of Pemberton's social

importance. Then he turned to Dexter, and holding his hand firmly in his strong grip he complimented him on his achievements in the field of chemistry generally and in the soap business particularly.

Dexter and Pemberton liked him immediately and both of them felt that Peck's estimate of his former boss was colored by prejudice.

"What a splendid place you have here, Junius," said Crosby enthusiastically.

This was the first time that he had ever called his ex-employee by his given name; if this were intended as an evidence of friendliness, the intent was not lost upon Peck, who was more mystified than ever.

After a perfunctory discussion of general topics, and after Crosby had expressed a desire to be taken through the plant later, to which proposition Peck had readily agreed, Crosby settled back in his chair and got down to the object of his visit in his usual, direct manner.

"I suppose, Junius," he began, letting his

glance travel to the faces of the others, "you gentlemen are wondering why I came here?"

"Well," smiled Peck, "we are honored by your visit, but it is somewhat unexpected."

"Quite so. Well...I discovered something on my return this morning that appeared to require an explanation—if not an apology; I'm afraid apology is the proper word—so I decided that it was up to me, personally, to call here and explain."

Peck and his associates exchanged glances, but they were as much in the dark as ever; this was not what they expected Crosby to say.

"I believe," continued Crosby, "that you have been negotiating with a man named Peck, of New Haven, for the purchase of his brand, which, I understand, antedates your own?"

At last it was coming.

"Yes, sir," said Peck gravely.

"Well, I'm sorry to say to you that Mr. Reed bought the brand from this fellow, who seems to have been shrewd enough to work you against him, for a considerable amount."

Crosby waited to see what effect his words would have on his auditors, but the three of them sat silent as sphinxes.

"I understand that you offered this man $20,000 for his brand?"

"Yes," replied Peck laconically.

"Mr. Reed, it seems, was aware of your offer and overbid you, buying the brand for $23,000."

Crosby evidently expected this announcement to evoke some expression of astonishment or anger, but since none was forthcoming, he thought that they were all struck dumb with astonishment.

"Well," said he, after a moment, "you, Junius, were associated with me for some time, and I believe you know that while I am not a bit averse to a fight, at least I fight in the open."

"Always, sir," agreed Peck.

"Now, gentlemen, I came here to say to you that while Mr. Reed had full authority to act in my absence, his action in this matter was

and is entirely contrary to my ideas of business ethics, and I have told him so in no unmeasured terms. Fortunately, the damage he did is not irreparable, so I am here to offer you my apologies and to state that in no circumstances will we make any use of that brand; furthermore, I am prepared to turn it over to you at what we paid for it. If, however, you feel that we have caused you to pay an excessive price, then you may have it for what you originally offered—$20,000."

Peck, as spokesman, thanked Crosby for his generosity.

"Why did Reed want to buy the brand?" he asked innocently, "it wasn't worth anything to you people."

Crosby had no intention of concealing anything. He came to make a straightforward statement and he was prepared to lay his cards on the table, so he told frankly and fully of his instructions to Reed. He admitted that he wanted the formula, and he would like, if possible, to arrive now at some basis upon which he could obtain it for his company.

"I left the matter in the hands of a young man whose intelligence and judgment I unfortunately overestimated, so it's my fault, not his. That's the whole story. If you gentlemen are willing to talk business, so am I, but whether you are or not, that will have no bearing on my proposition regarding your brand. We don't want it and won't use it."

Then Peck told Crosby the whole story. He related how Reed's letter had fallen into his hands, and how they had then prepared the trap for him, after buying the real title to the brand from the Middle West people.

Crosby listened to the story in blank amazement.

"Why, according to that," he said, "what we bought isn't worth a damn!"

"Not a red cent, Mr. Crosby," smiled Peck.

Crosby saw the foolish position he had been placed in by a few youngsters, simply because he had put his trust in an incompetent man. His situation was the result, he told himself, of his own bad judgment, so he accepted the blame.

"You wouldn't think it possible," said he, "that an ordinary fool could play such havoc with business, would you?"

"There's no limit to the damage a fool can do," said Peck philosophically, "if the fool has authority."

"Junius," said Crosby, "I have never up to this moment admitted that I made a mistake in letting a man leave my employ, but if it's any satisfaction to you, I'll say now that I was asleep when I let you resign."

"That, coming from you, Mr. Crosby, I consider the highest compliment I have ever received."

"Gentlemen," said Crosby, "can we come together on the matter of this formula? Have you any proposition?"

"We have never thought of granting any rights, Mr. Crosby," said Peck.

Crosby was silent for a moment.

"Peck," he said finally, "you know that we have a great business—it has dropped off some, but it's still pretty large—and you have

a fine opportunity here, too, but it has got to be developed. Now, I've decided to let Reed go. I hate to do it as his father was one of my best and oldest friends, but the step is necessary in justice to the business. To do that, however, means that I must get back into harness again, and to tell you the truth, I'm tired. I may also say," he added with a smile, "that I'm not as good as I used to be."

"Nonsense, Mr. Crosby," laughed Peck.

"No, it isn't nonsense. Now, you boys are young, energetic, ingenious and capable. I have a fine business and a wide experience. We might combine our forces and together develop the biggest thing in the soap business in the world. The idea is worth consideration. Does it appeal to you?"

"It has possibilities," admitted Peck, beginning to see his dream come true.

"What's your judgment, Mr. Pemberton—and yours, Mr. Dexter?"

They both believed it was worth thinking about.

"Good!" said Crosby, "let's make a dinner appointment at my house for, say, to-morrow evening; the sooner the better. Will you gentlemen be my guests?"

The invitation was accepted.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE dinner at Crosby's proved to be a momentous affair. On that occasion was born the germ of an idea which was destined to develop later into the great enterprise that became known as "International Petroleum Products" and the nucleus of which was the consolidation of the Crosby and Peck businesses.

Into that combination went the Pemberton cash and the Crosby interests, and out of it grew many splendid plants from whose tall stacks belched the incessant smoke of a vast new industry.

Youth, ingenuity and ambitious effort, guided by the hand of experience and backed by unlimited resources, kept the industry on the highway of success until it had earned for

itself a place among the great commercial enterprises of the nation.

Junius Peck's ambition to become the guiding star of big business found its realization sooner than he expected on the day when he became president of the new combination.

Pemberton as vice-president developed into an excellent executive, to the great joy of his father, and proved that he possessed a measure of business ability which he himself had never suspected.

Dexter presided over a wonderful laboratory, where he amply justified the confidence of his friends by developing many unique products which added to his fame and to his fortune.

Crosby, happy in the fulfillment of his prophecy, continued to give the enterprise the benefit of his experience and judgment as chairman of the board, but he was content to take life easy and leave the details of management to the younger heads.

Reed went back to the law, and seemed to

be prospering. How he managed to install himself in comfortable—almost luxurious—offices was something of a mystery to those who knew of his limited resources; but Peck always suspected that Crosby's loyalty to the memory of an old friend had something to do with it.

It was directly following the period of reorganization, and just after Peck had been elevated to the presidency of the company, that Pemberton came into his office—the same luxurious room that Crosby formerly occupied—and greeted him cheerily:

"Hello, Mr. President!"

Peck looked up from his desk, where he was scrutinizing some documents, and arose with mock dignity.

"That's the proper salutation, Mr. Vice-President," he said, "but hereafter, you will please have yourself announced, in accordance with the rules; sit down."

"I beg your pardon, Boss," bowed Pemberton, taking a chair and drawing it close to the

desk. He took from his vest pocket a thin gold case and offered it to Peck, who helped himself to a cigarette, lit it and reclined comfortably in his chair, while he waited for his associate to say something.

"What's on your mind?" inquired Peck, finally.

Pemberton, with a far-away look in his eyes, had absently selected a cigarette, and, holding it between his fingers was idly tapping its end against the cover of his case.

"On my mind?" he repeated, "why....er ....nothing—as usual."

"Seen Muriel lately?"

The unexpected question galvanized Pemberton into active interest. It was one of the very few times that Peck had mentioned her name to him voluntarily.

"Why, yes," said Pemberton, "I saw her last night. Funny, I was thinking about you and her."

"Of me and her?"

"Say, old man," began Pemberton earnestly,

but with apparent embarrassment, "I'd like to ask you something. Of course, don't answer the question unless you care to, but....what I'd really like to know is, why you broke away the minute I began calling on her?"

"What chance did I have," laughed Peck gaily, "to compete with a diamond-studded scion of one of America's oldest—"

"Oh, rats!" interrupted Pemberton, holding up his hand in protest, "you wouldn't have laid down for the Prince of Wales. There must have been some other reason."

"There was," admitted Peck, still smiling.

"You were pretty good friends?"

"Yes."

"I had the idea that your feeling for her was —er—a little stronger than friendly?"

"I once thought her the embodiment of feminine perfection," confessed Peck.

"Well?"

"She was, in fact, my inspiration in the early days. Every fellow, you know," he added laughingly, "needs an inspiration—and I'm an

orphan. Muriel was the first really fine girl I ever knew."

"And?"

"Well, I've met other women since, and I've found one I like better."

"Is that on the level, old man?" asked Pemberton eagerly.

"Of course it is," laughed Peck so heartily that there seemed little room for doubt. "Why do you suspect it isn't?"

"Because it's too good to be true; I was afraid, old friend, that you loved her, too."

"Too?" grinned Peck.

"I came here," said Pemberton, "in fear and trembling, to break the news to you....I didn't know how you'd take it....Junius, old top, congratulate me. She said 'yes' last night."

Peck jumped up, grasped Pemberton by the hand and pulled him to his feet.

"My two best friends," he said, "and you thought I'd feel sore! Nothing could add more to my happiness!"

"You really mean that?" asked Pemberton, still with the shadow of doubt across his mind.

"Of course I do," wringing Pemberton's hand strenuously, "of course, I do—dear brother-in-law!"

"Brother-in-law?" repeated Pemberton in perplexity.

"Why, yes—the girl I told you about—the one I like better than Murial—is your sister Anne; we also became engaged last night."

"What!" gasped Pemberton, fairly stunned with amazement. "You and Anne— Good lord!" He put an arm about Peck and hugged him. "Why, I didn't know you were calling regularly at the house."

"You should go home occasionally."

"And dad?" asked Pemberton, still with his hand on Peck's shoulder, "does he know?"

"Yes, and approves."

"And mother?"

"She kissed me last night, and called me 'son.'"

They stood, these two men, each with an

arm about the other, like a pair of sentimental schoolgirls, with, perhaps, the suspicion of moisture in their eyes, and for a moment neither spoke. It was a silent demonstration of that most unselfish of all attachments, one that transcends in its loyalty even the affection of a man for a woman—the sentiment which a red-blooded poet has phrased, "The love of a man for a man."

"Have you fixed on a date?" asked Pemberton.

"Not yet; have you?"

"No, but if the girls are willing, let's jump off together— What do you say?"

"That's a bet!" agreed Peck enthusiastically.

THE END